Dossier

Gulf Cooperation Council's Challenges and Prospects

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The onset of 2014 marked an unprecedented qualitative development in relations between the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recalled their ambassadors from Qatar. These events had seriously grave ramifications for the future of the GCC as a leading regional organisation in the Arab world.

The ambassadorial crisis was ironed out after GCC leaders met in Riyadh on 16 November 2014, and the ambassadors were all back in Doha by the time the 35th annual GCC summit was held on 9 December. But that diplomatic crisis, unprecedented in the GCC’s history, underlined the need for a re-evaluation of the GCC and its achievements since it was established in 1981. The crisis highlighted a number of key differences between member states over various regional and international issues. Central here are their views on the repercussions and reverberations of what is known as the Arab Spring. Other core issues pertain to progress made towards the hoped-for integration, co-ordination and co-operation at the political, economic, security, and military, not to mention foreign policy levels.
The challenges and threats to regional security – and to that of the GCC countries in particular – originating from regional neighbours, certainly played a significant role in galvanising reconciliation among the member states, and in ensuring the ambassadors’ return to Doha. A trio of geopolitical developments affected the region in the fourth quarter of 2014:

- The expansion of the so-called Islamic State (IS) just north of the Arabian Peninsula, that is, in Syria and Iraq, threatened to penetrate deep into the whole region.

- Houthis seized control of Yemen in the southern part of the Peninsula.

- Continued negotiations between the P5+1 states (Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and the United States, plus Germany) and Iran, the outcomes of which may not be in the best interests of GCC member states in terms of the regional balance of power.

By publishing this collection, AlJazeera Centre for Studies aims to present an assessment of the history of the GCC since its inception, and to forecast possible scenarios for its future in light of recent regional and international developments. The collection encompasses five main points, which have been tackled by researchers and experts on GCC affairs.

1. **The GCC’s purpose and basis for unity in a regional and international context**

Chapters in this section cover reasons for the GCC’s existence (the so-called “official story” of its inception), GCC unity in the eyes of the masses (public opinion), and principles governing inter-GCC relationships in the current regional and international contexts.

Dr. Omar Al Hassan discusses the official viewpoints of member states on their reasons and premises for establishing the GCC in the first chapter, while Ghassan Alshihaby analyses viewpoints of GCC citizens on the idea of unity and how the local media shape public opinion on the GCC in the second chapter.

2. **Challenges to GCC co-operation over three decades**

The chapters in this section cover economic co-operation and integration, where the GCC’s achievements have been impressive, as well as security and military co-operation, where not as much progress has been made.
In a chapter titled, “GCC’s Economic Cooperation and Integration: Achievements and Hurdles”, Dr. Khalid Shams Abdulqader delves into one of the most important avenues of co-operation between member states – the economy. He analyses what has been achieved, while pointing out the hurdles that have stood in the way of fuller economic integration. Dr. Zafer Alajmi then attempts to answer the question posed in the title of his chapter, “Gulf Military Cooperation: Tangible Gains or Limited Results?”

3. GCC cooperation: deepening integration vs. widening membership.
In light of a high-pressure regional context that forces the GCC states to constantly adjust their geopolitical positioning to protect themselves from possible challenges and threats, doctors Yahya Alzahrani and Saud Al Tamamy discuss address issues related to whether there is a need for the GCC, and what shape it might take in future. In his chapter, Dr. Alzahrani attempts to answer the question of whether GCC unity is necessary or optional, while Dr. Al Tamamy, considers the possibilities and restrictions governing the possible expansion of the GCC’s membership in his chapter.

4. Inter-GCC relations: contradictory interests and contrasting viewpoints
Islam Khaled Hassan tackles the reasons and possible solutions for disputes between member states, focusing on the diplomatic crisis in 2014, when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Doha.

5. The GCC and future challenges.
Dr. Ahmed Alazdi raises the very serious issue of the impact of political sectarianism and terrorism on national and regional security within the GCC countries. Dr. Taha Al-Farra discusses the crucial matter of future water security in the GCC, while Dr. Jassim Hussain tackles the hot topic of alternative energy and the future of oil and gas in the GCC.

The dossier ends with a summary of results from all chapters.

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The GCC's Formation: The Official Version

Dr. Omar Al Hassan*

Abstract

On 26 May 1981, following a meeting between the heads of state of six Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman) held in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was announced. The meeting came to be known as the founding summit because this was when the GCC Charter was signed. The meeting came to be known as the founding summit because this was when the GCC Charter was signed. The Charter lays down the GCC's basic objectives, which include promoting cooperation among the countries of the Gulf region, strengthening relations between them, and achieving coordination and integration across a range of diverse fields.

While security concerns might well have been lurking behind the scenes at that time, the official statements and explanations issued indicate that a diverse set of contextual factors prompted the GCC's founding. According to some, the GCC was an expression of the shared values and common bonds between the Gulf nations, while others point out that the GCC was also a response to external developments and challenges that affected the region in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the more significant of these external factors include: the so-called Islamic revolution in Iran and the war between Iraq and

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learning.

This chapter argues security has been one of the GCC’s top priorities since its inception, even though the first statement issued by the Supreme Council in May 1981 did not explicitly mention security at all. Nevertheless, the importance of security issues has not prevented the GCC from focusing strongly on economic, cultural and social cooperation in their endeavours to achieve regional unity. As it is, despite the GCC’s assertion that regional security will be ensured by the sons and daughters of the region, the member states clearly differentiated the security of the Gulf region from that of Iran, choosing to side with Iraq in its war against Iran in the 1980s. Of course, the security of the Gulf is integral to wider Arab national security, and not unrelated to it as Iran tried to argue at the time.

Introduction

The countries bordering the Arabian Gulf’s Western shore are considered to be of pivotal importance by virtue of their strategic location and economic influence. This is borne out by the proportion of world trade that takes place in these states, and that fact that more than a third of the world’s proven oil reserves are located here. The latter fact alone makes the Gulf region enormously important in global economic development.

At the same time, the GCC’s member states represent a coherent political complex that is held together by common historical experiences and linked by geographical proximity and shared borders. Given their importance and interrelatedness, the need arose for a collective platform to express their interests, to deal with regional and international events, and to respond appropriately to regional and global variables and developments. Accordingly, the formation of the GCC was announced and the GCC Charter signed on 25 May 1981, promoting cooperation among member states, the development of relations between them in a range of different fields via mutually beneficial projects, and the standardising of systems to serve their interests and enhance their capacities to abide by their principles and values.

Given the apparent difference between the stated motives behind the formation of the GCC, and the underlying motives dictated by prevailing regional and international conditions, this chapter is divided into three parts. The chapter begins with the
motivating factors from an official GCC point of view. Next, there is a discussion on intraregional, regional, and international motivating factors. The third section first compares the stated and underlying motives in relation to key theories of international relations, and ends with general conclusions.

**Conditioning factors: the official view**

The initial proposals by the GCC’s founding members reveal that security was the dominant factor behind the organisation. Of three proposals submitted, security was the dominant theme in those from Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Saudi proposal called for the sourcing of weapons for the Gulf’s armed forces from a single supplier and for the widest possible coordination between the armed forces of each state (rather than the creation of a military alliance). While ruling out the option of entering into a military alliance with foreign powers, the Saudi proposal called for the deployment of a joint military force if it became necessary to defend the sovereignty of any member states, as well as for the preservation of internal order and independence. Among other things, the Omani proposal called for the creation of a joint naval force to defend and ensure freedom of passage through the Straits of Hormuz, which are often seen as being the region’s lifeline.

The third proposal was submitted by Kuwait and, despite its focus on the potential economic, cultural and political benefits of co-operation, it also followed proposals put forward by the late emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, who stressed the need to address regional threats directed at the Gulf states. Former Bahraini foreign minister, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, had conveyed the proposal for a regional organisation comprising the Gulf states to the late King Khalid of Saudi Arabia, who gave the proposal his blessing. The proposal was then referred to the then-ruler of Kuwait, the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah who also gave the concept his blessing, subsequently asking scholars at the University of Kuwait to present a blueprint for the creation of the GCC.

Nevertheless, the preamble to the GCC Charter does not mention security. **Instead, the factors behind the formation of the GCC are as follows:**

"Being fully aware of the ties of special relations, common characteristics and similar systems founded on the creed of Islam which bind them; and desiring to effect coordination, cooperation and integration between them in all fields; and, having the conviction that coordination, cooperation, and integration between them serve the sublime objectives of the Arab Nation; and, having the conviction that coordination,
cooperation, and integration between them serve the sublime objectives of the Arab Nation; and, in pursuit of the goal of strengthening cooperation and reinforcement of the links between them; and in an endeavour to complement efforts already begun in all essential areas that concern their peoples and realize their hopes for a better future on the path to unity of their States; and in conformity with the Charter of the League of Arab States which calls for the realization of closer relations and stronger bonds; and in order to channel their efforts to reinforce and serve Arab and Islamic causes...”.(5)

Within this framework, Article 4 of the Charter sets out the basic objectives of the GCC as:

• To effect coordination, integration and interconnection between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity between them.

• To deepen and strengthen relations, ties and areas of cooperation prevailing between their peoples in various fields.

• To formulate similar regulations in various fields including: economic and financial affairs; commerce, customs and communications; education and culture.

• To 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.(6)

Apart from these statements about the founding of the GCC, other official statements reveal a variety of factors behind its formation. As the late Saudi King Fahd bin Abdulaziz pointed out, "The establishment of the GCC represents a positive response to a regional purpose and need dictated by the compulsions of the times, in addition to the element of consanguinity and points of convergence between the six countries". (7)

This view was echoed by Bahiyyah al-Jashi, the Second Deputy to the President of Bahrain’s Consultative Council (Shura), who said:

“The formation of the GCC was a predestined matter because the region possesses a number of shared values and a common culture and religion besides similar political, economic and social characteristics and kinship bonds that bind Gulf families together in a network of relations through intermarriage and tribal customs”.(8)
The opinion expressed by Ambassador Abdullah Besharah, the first Secretary-General of the GCC, was that:

"The idea of the formation of the GCC originated from the indignation felt by the leaders in the Gulf region over the abnormal and immoral attitudes adopted by some powers to compel the Gulf governments to agree to the programme adopted by Baghdad against Egypt, in addition to the triumph of the revolution [against the Shah] in Iran and the accompanying revolutionary propaganda barrage directed against the governments of the Gulf, the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war in September 1980, tensions between the Sultanate of Oman and South Yemen, and the transformations witnessed in the world arena in the aftermath of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and its implications for the stability of Pakistan". (9)

Regional and international pressures
This section outlines some of the local, regional and international considerations that were at work behind the formation of the GCC.

Local considerations
The so-called ‘Islamic revolution’ and internal transformation in Iran. In the second half of 1978, conditions in Iran deteriorated because of the popular revolt against the Shah. His regime eventually collapsed and the establishment of the so-called Islamic Republic was proclaimed in February 1979. This added a new layer of complexity to the geo-strategic situation in the Gulf and reinforced the impetus towards the formation of the GCC. At the same time, anxiety was increasing about the spread of Shia Islam in the Gulf region, which was of particular concern to Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (10)

The Iran–Iraq War. The Iran–Iraq War began in September 1980 and continued until 1988. The war preceded the formal announcement of the GCC by eight months, and helped focus the attention of the six member states on formally establishing the GCC. The war had created enormous security concerns for the Gulf states, which found themselves facing the devastating consequences of a protracted war between two formidable regional powers, which was likely to bring major losses not only to the warring parties but to all the countries in the region. (11)

Social and economic homogeneity. To a large extent, the Gulf states have a similar economic base as well as similar political and social structures. Each country aspires to
reduce its dependence on oil and diversify its income streams by establishing a viable and diversified industrial base. Many analysts have emphasised that the decision to form the GCC was not taken on the spur of the moment but was the institutional embodiment of a long-standing historical, social and cultural reality. The GCC member states are distinguished by the depth of their religious and cultural heritage as well as strong kinship ties. This affinity and unity is bolstered by the states being similarly geographically extended across a desert-like coastal environment. All these factors have forged close bonds between the people, facilitated their movements and interactions and united them in a common identity and shared values.(12)

Regional considerations
The weakening of the Arab League, and the relocation of its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis in the wake of the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979, represented the collapse of the previous sense of collective security for the Arab nations. This created a security vacuum in the Arab world. The Gulf States, for their part, opted to form the GCC to help create a sense of solidarity and security for their own region, which was then facing enormous challenges.

Some analysts trace the origin of the GCC to this need for regional collective security. As soon as the GCC was formed in May 1981 the member states created a joint military defence force, which was the first of its kind in the region. This added an extra dimension to the idea of collective security as a result of escalating military tensions in the region and the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war. That war subsequently left both parties exhausted and incapable of playing the role of 'gendarme' in the Gulf region, which in turn, led to structural changes in the regional order, compelling the other Gulf states to focus on securing regional peace and stability.(13)

International considerations
International considerations means the involvement of the Gulf region in the Cold War. In January 1980, US President Jimmy Carter made a speech in which he announced that the US would use military force if necessary to defend its interests in the Gulf. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev’s response to what became known as the Carter Doctrine had a direct impact on the security of the Gulf region. The Soviets reacted strongly, attempting to exploit their ties with Iraq and other Gulf states to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the United States. This added tension to the negotiations between the GCC states, tensions that were deepened by the ongoing Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the fact that the region was being caught up in the Cold War.
A number of other factors were also key. The most important of these was the change in international economic relations as power shifted away from the corporations and governments of the major oil-consuming countries to those of the major oil-producing countries.

Other analysts have pointed out that the idea of a Gulf accord goes back to the mid-1930s when Britain encouraged certain emirates to consider forming a union. This is not surprising given the shared social and cultural values, customs and traditions among the communities of the region. In addition, all six countries have similar systems of rule, similar economic philosophies and share a dependence on Western capitalism.(14)

In summary, various external pressures contributed to the formation of the GCC, the most important of which were:

- The war in Afghanistan and the impact of Soviet occupation of that country, which signalled the Soviet Union’s intention to participate in and shape the affairs of the Gulf region. Moscow then developed a special relationship with Iraq and was cultivating contacts in Kuwait, causing some controversy between the countries of the Gulf. When US President Jimmy Carter announced the Carter Doctrine in January 1980, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev reacted strongly, and the region became embroiled in the Cold War.

- The Iranian revolution which began in February 1979, combined with the policies subsequently pursued by Iran, particularly its attempts to export its revolution to the Gulf region more broadly, to foment Sunni–Shia conflict, and to campaign for the overthrow of the Gulf monarchies, created major doubts and apprehensions on both sides of the Gulf.

- The Iraq-Iran War from 1981 to 1988 occurred as a result of long-standing disputes between Iraq and Iran over bilateral and Gulf issues. It began with Iraq’s demand for the revision of the 1975 agreement between the two countries over the use of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. This demand revived a number of ‘dormant’ bilateral disputes, and it was expected that revolutionary Iran would review all its interests, which could in turn shift the balance of power in the Gulf, including the stance of the largest state – Iraq. Undoubtedly the political, and later military, conflict between the two most powerful countries of the region placed the security of the other Gulf states in great danger. It became necessary for these other states to adopt a unified and balanced stance to
reduce damage caused by the outbreak of war. The GCC states have since helped to defuse various crises, whether by creating a buffer zone, by adopting a policy of neutrality, or by attempting to mediate in disputes.

- Internal polarisation within the Arab world, which arose after the signing of the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979. This action by Egypt called the entire concept of Arab national security into question and seriously undermined the Arab League. In this context, the Gulf states became wary of the regional security vacuum, and felt a pressing need for a forum for mutual consultation, in which they could weigh up their interests and consider their policy options.

All these circumstances exposed the Gulf to the vagaries of international bipolarity, inflicting losses on, and exacerbating the anxieties of, these states. The war in Afghanistan, despite being largely a Soviet–American war, was raging in the vicinity of the Gulf, with both superpowers attempting to safeguard their regional interests. Washington’s need for fuel oil, its policy on Israel and its consternation over the Iranian revolution led the US to support the Afghan Mujahideen for obviously contradictory reasons.

Theoretical perspectives on the formation of the GCC

Two theoretical perspectives on the processes related to the formation of regional associations and alliances between states are helpful in understanding the origins of the GCC. These are briefly outlined below.

**Neo-liberalism or international interdependence**

“Interdependence” occurs when disparate persons or parts of a system interact in such a way as to become dependent on one another. (15) In international relations, interdependence refers to a state of affairs distinguished by reciprocal influences between states or between actors from different states. (16)

Under neo-liberalism, regional or international institutions order the interests of different states and administer cooperative arrangements between them. Ostensibly, such cooperative arrangements aim to reduce anarchy both regionally and internationally, and the participation of states in international organisations should promote pluralism and cooperation as a means of securing their national interests and overcoming any obstacles standing in the way of interdependence. (17)
According to neo-liberal theory, however, cooperation becomes difficult to achieve in the absence of reciprocal interests between states. With states cooperating for the sake of gaining benefits, great difficulties or setbacks occur if some states refuse to comply or cooperate. Neo-liberals suggest that cooperation can be ensured if states and other actors promise to observe certain rules, with this cooperation guaranteeing benefits to all parties. Of course, cooperation is easy to achieve in certain fields such as communications, or economic and cultural exchanges. In relation to cooperation in the field of security and military affairs, however, the neo-liberals are less optimistic. According to neo-liberals the greater the degree of interdependence the greater the cooperation, with this, in turn, contributing to regional and international stability.

Interdependence relies on certain factors, the most important of which are:

- The volume of transactions among the principal actors in the system.
- The sensitivity of state actors to changes occurring in the system.
- The responsiveness of different actors to external change.
- The availability of institutional frameworks for transactions between states.

In terms of this theory, the formation of the GCC would be seen as having been directed towards adjusting the interests of the six member states, and putting multilateral cooperative arrangements in place. The GCC became a vehicle for securing the national interests of all six member countries and helped them to overcome various obstacles obstructing their interdependence. Likewise, cooperation between the member states was eased by the reciprocity of their interests. Thus the six member states moved to form the GCC with a view to attaining unlimited benefits, trusting that all the members would comply with the rules of cooperation and abide by their commitments. At the same time, the council initially agreed to cooperate in fields where this would be relatively easy and comparatively uncomplicated such as social, political and cultural affairs, while postponing or withholding cooperation in the more sensitive fields of military and strategic affairs.

Regional integration

Theories of regional integration developed out of attempts to understand and ultimately predict the integration of different states in terms of incentives, motives and mechanisms of cooperation. Regional integration refers to the emergence of a supranational institution within a community of states that takes over the management of certain functional areas formerly performed by constituent units of an integrated community. The theory applies very well to the formation of the GCC.
The theory of functionalism or functional integration, as advocated by David Mitrany, rests on the separation between the political and economic spheres and a focus on functional integration in terms of economic and technical fields without political integration. Mitrany cites the League of Nations as an example of both the success and failure of integration. While the League collapsed as a political body, he points out, the International Labour Organization survived as a functional body. According to Mitrany, the best means of securing peace and cooperation among nations is for countries to join in functional regional communities, transferring aspects of their economic and technical functions to such communities without surrendering their political sovereignty.

The functional-integration model is based on a rejection of total political merger between national political units. According to advocates of this model, the way to integration lies through gradualism and an initial focus on limited sectors. The integration model posits that even if states are very similar and strongly in favour of integration, it is not possible to achieve integration quickly since is necessarily a long drawn-out process of gradual steps that eventually lead to full integration.

Theorists argue that a number of prerequisites are necessary for regional integration processes to work, the most important of which are:

- Social homogeneity. Scholars generally agree that certain minimum requirements are essential in this regard. These include an absence of national cultural prejudice, the existence of friendly relations between the concerned states, and agreement on the objectives of their foreign policies.

- Shared values. A strong sense of shared values, particularly among the elites, seems to be crucial. Thus if economic integration is the aim, the process will be accelerated if participants share either capitalist or socialist values for example. Similarly, political integration may be facilitated by a shared adherence to the values of liberalism and democracy.

- Reciprocity of benefits. Countries need clear incentives if they are to surrender aspects of their national sovereignty in favour of maximising shared benefits.

- Historical bonds of friendship. Friendly relations between participating nations in the past tend to be conducive to peaceful common action. Similarly, it is unlikely that previous mutual enmity or hatred could form a basis for peaceful interactions.
• External factors. Perceived threats from external sources, especially threats of aggression or war or of adverse trade conditions and so on.

The formation of the GCC is congruent with such theories. The GCC has gradually developed functional institutions without requiring complete constitutional merger or the surrender of state sovereignty on the part of member states. The six member countries have concentrated on limited areas of cooperation that have the potential to lead to a continuous widening of the scope for integration with a view to achieving unity as set out in the GCC Charter.

Thus, it can be argued that GCC satisfies all the prerequisites of regional integration, namely social homogeneity, shared values, reciprocity of benefit and external challenges; the emergence of the GCC in 1981 was therefore entirely to be expected.

Conclusion
Having provided an account of the official statements, the opinions of analysts and prevailing theories regarding the origins of the GCC it may be concluded that the GCC came into being at a time in history when the Gulf region was experiencing major security challenges and military tensions. These circumstances required that the GCC prioritise the issues of peace and security at the forefront of its concerns, even though the first official statement issued by the GCC in May 1981 did not mention security directly. At that time, the factors mentioned included strong historical bonds, shared values and culture, and similar political systems.

Perhaps this was the perception of the founders at that time. The GCC Charter emphasised the basic goal as being the achievement of unity, but this would be achieved through gradual steps of cooperation, coordination, the creation of regional institutions, a merging of policies and procedures, and the downplaying of differences. Following this path the GCC addressed the concept of collective security when it created the Peninsula Shield Force, which formed the nucleus of a GCC military force, and played a material and morale-boosting role in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.(21)

Essentially, my views can be summarised as follows.
• Security concerns have not prevented GCC member states from focusing on multilateral cooperation in the economic, cultural, and social spheres, with a view to achieving their ultimate goal of unity.
• External (regional and global) conditions played a greater role in the formation of the GCC than internal factors. However, even if external conditions ceased to play a role, the GCC would probably continue to exist and function by virtue of the shared objectives and interests of its members.

• In spite of the member states’ assertion that the defence of the Gulf region is the responsibility of all its inhabitants, the GCC differentiated between the security of the Gulf states and that of Iran, thereby siding with Iraq against Iran. In so doing, the GCC declared that the security of the Gulf was linked to the security of the Arab nations and not isolated from this issue, as was suggested by Iran at that time.

• Despite facing many obstacles, such as border disputes between member states, the fallout from the Iranian revolution, the Iraq–Iran war, and Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the GCC’s origins and characteristics as outlined in this chapter have enabled it to survive and thrive while other experiments related to Arab unity have faltered.

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Khaleeji Public Opinion on the GCC

Ghassan Alshihaby*

Abstract

This chapter highlights the unofficial position of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries towards the idea of Gulf unity and the establishment of a more formal union between member states. It begins with a review of the wording of the GCC Charter on the issue of unity and show how the possible formation of a ‘Gulf Union’ – a concept raised periodically in official circles – has been responded to by both ordinary people and state authorities over time.

The views of both supporters and opponents of the GCC are examined and attempt to present the grounds on which each group bases its arguments. The evolution of unofficial public attitudes of the peoples of the Gulf states towards the issue of union are traced, noting that when GCC was established in 1981, the public was not consulted, and that, until recently, the issue of union has seldom been high on the agenda of either the GCC or the citizens of its member states. Even during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the coordination of political and military responses was seen as the crucial reason why GCC officials should meet: the formalisation of a union was not seen as necessary for this. Interest in a Gulf Union seems to have been revived by the “Arab Spring” when, perhaps for the first time, urgent calls for progress have been heard in both popular and official quarters.
Introduction

The word peoples is repeated four times in the Charter of the GCC, and the question posed in this chapter relates to the role of the ‘peoples’ of the Gulf in the establishment of the GCC. To some extent, it can be argued that this question is now irrelevant because, in the more than three decades of its existence, the Council has made gains that cannot be ignored, and has achieved a number of its aims and objectives (albeit at a snail’s pace). Nevertheless, with rapidly expanding public access to the internet and smart phones, the “peoples” are increasingly questioning what the GCC has and has not achieved, and the potential merits and disadvantages of formalising a Gulf Union.

Yesterday, when the GCC began

When the establishment of the GCC was announced in 1981, Kuwait was the only country to enjoy a system of popular representation. The peoples of the Gulf states were not consulted about the new organisation and public opinion was not taken into consideration. None of the countries’ authorities asked their citizens for their blessing regarding the large step that was being taken to shape the future of the region, or even drew a map to show the public the entity being formulated, which might be moving slowly towards formalising a union.

In other words, the general public in the Gulf were neither ready nor able to freely express their opinions about the establishment of the GCC. The press reflected – to some extent – the views of each society, but not in ways that were markedly different from the opinions of the authorities.

It is fair to say that freedom of opinion was seriously constrained in the region during this period. Reports published by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Reporters without Borders in the 1980s and 1990s placed the Gulf region in the bottom half of global freedom of expression ratings. The mainstream media (press, radio and television) were monopolised by governments, with licenses for independent daily newspapers granted only to those organisations trusted by the authorities. Radio and television remained under strict government control until the mid-2000s, when satellite stations began to breach regime controls. This means that until recently the people of the Gulf were free to express their opinions only if these were considered acceptable by the narrow and strictly controlled state-approved channels.
In the midst of events

Of all the challenges the GCC has faced since its inception, perhaps the most significant and threatening in recent decades was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. At that point, unity was not on the GCC’s agenda despite the fact that the preamble of the GCC Charter states that, among other reasons, member states established the GCC “in an endeavour to complement efforts already begun in all essential areas that concern their peoples and to realise their hopes for a better future on the path to unity of their states”.(1) The centrality of unity in attaining the GCC’s goals is also underlined by the first objective cited in Article 4 of the Charter, which reads “To effect coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States in all fields in order to achieve unity between them”. However, so far, the steps taken have been slow and, for the peoples of the Gulf, virtually intangible.

This chapter is based on communications with different categories of citizens in the six GCC countries. Many now see the GCC as little more than an interface that is steadily losing its lustre, as if it had been coated in a new layer of dust each year. Some recalled yearning to attend its opening sessions in the early days, and waiting for its final statement after each summit.

However, when these statements seemed to be merely repetition of the same points year after year, a kind of despair began to creep in, and people stopped diligently following the GCC’s work.

Many stated a belief that the GCC has delivered no tangible benefits to citizens. Its work, they asserted, seems to have been limited to relatively simple matters such as enhancing citizens’ mobility between member states by issuing special ID cards instead of passports, and assigning special queues to GCC citizens at airports. Several more ambitious projects have been blocked and/or delayed by different ministries, however, with many citizens now believing that, for the GCC authorities, the most important matter of official cooperation is internal security, which amounts to little more than exchanging lists of suspects and suspicious activities.

Some of those contacted noted that even the GCC leaders seem to be bored with the structure, and appear reluctant to continue sending the type of high-level delegations to meetings that they did in the first decade of the GCC’s existence. Since the mid-2000s the GCC has only rarely completed its business in the presence of all the member states’ kings, sultans, princes and presidents. Several of the people expressed a wish that the GCC would either “strongly proceed with great strides” or transform itself into a set of committees to coordinate initiatives between member states at an inter-ministerial level.
The resurgence of the idea of a union

From late 2010, the winds of the Arab Spring blew into Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), passing through the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and affecting Bahrain quite strongly. This Gulf Spring revived the idea of a union in the collective mind of the Gulf’s peoples. Perhaps for the first time, public calls grew louder and official efforts intensified, indicating that establishing a union had become an urgent necessity.

In 2011, the official response from the GCC to the Arab Spring focused on the targeting of the region. Attention and accusations were directed at Iran as the alleged driver, instigator, financier, and trainer of groups behind the uprisings, especially in Bahrain (2) and Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province. GCC leaders and others seemed to feel that external efforts to destabilise the GCC would be easy given the member states’ failure to achieve the unity called for in the GCC Charter. The concept of union was discussed more seriously after King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, speaking at the opening of the 32nd session of the GCC’s Supreme Council in December 2011, declared that:

"History and experience have taught us not to face the world and say we have everything we need. Anyone who does so will find themselves at the back of the line, facing real losses and weakness. This is something we do not accept for our countries’ or our peoples’ stability and security. Therefore, I ask you today to move beyond the stage of cooperation and to unite into one single entity that can bring good and drive away evil".(3)

This proposal garnered a positive reaction on social media, and inspired several journalists to pen articles in support of the idea, arguing that coordination has had its day in the GCC, and that it was time to seriously consider establishing a union.

Official and unofficial public opinion in the mainstream media

Dozens of overlapping definitions suggest that public opinion is agreement between members of a community about a particular topic, that it comprises views on a particular issue in a particular community, and is a set of ideas and beliefs held by people about a particular issue and over a certain period or a judgment made by a group on an issue of public concern after an open and thorough discussion.

Writing about public opinion and psychological warfare, Hussein Abu Shanab observes that public opinion always remains a collection of individual opinions, regardless of their
agreement or unity or degree of homogeneity. He also states that public opinion is the outcome of “discussion and debate between individuals, where some individual views prevail over other views” or where a group reaches a new opinion following “exchange, interaction and conflict between the views of individuals and groups”.(4)

Essentially “public opinion” implies that there is general (not full) agreement among members of the public. Mindful of all the definitions of public opinion outlined, this chapter gathers information considered necessary to provide a sense of the prevailing unofficial public opinion in the Gulf on the idea of union. Texts related to King Abdullah’s speech quoted above are analysed. This speech was selected not only because the king has such a high political status among the Arab nations, but also because his country carries such significant economic, political, geographical, spiritual, demographic, and historic weight. Furthermore, the speech was not merely issued as a press statement, but was delivered at a summit attended by the leaders of five of the six Gulf countries.

Acknowledging that newspapers mostly publish what corresponds to their own editorial line, approach and policy, articles published in newspapers in the GCC countries were reviewed. Searching the electronic archives of various newspapers in each of the GCC states, using the terms Gulf unity and Gulf Union, twenty-three related articles were found, the earliest dating back to 2004.(5) The articles in question differed widely, and were included in the review if they mentioned either “Gulf unity” or “Gulf Union”, regardless of whether these two terms formed the core of the article or were just mentioned in passing.

The following section is an analysis of what these articles indicate about public opinion on the question of union. They are grouped into those that reflect enthusiasm about the idea and those that express some reservations.

Reflecting enthusiasm for union

An editorial titled “Qatari Arabs”, published in the Qatari newspaper al-Arab, on 8 July 2012 reads as follows, “There is no doubt that the Gulf Union, the dream that we wish to see as reality before us, is a union which is based on the single destiny that unites the Gulf states, and is able to solve many of the Gulf’s problems, both internal and external”.

This position was supported by another journalist who wrote, “Whether in the long or short run, the dangers gone or exacerbated, or whether we agree or disagree on security
or political affairs, the Gulf Arab states have no choice other than to go for unity or union, and to participate in a unified economic, political, or defensive system”.(6)

Khalid al-Saleh sees Gulf unity as an existential issue, saying: "When we talk about the Gulf unity, we talk about the future of our children and grandchildren, and those coming after them. It is an issue of existence...Anyone approaching it with insults should be exposed and uncovered before us. There is no space for anyone to manipulate our future unity, whatever their motives or interests”.(7)

Enthusiasm, hopes and appeals are common among those who support unity. As another passionate supporter of Gulf unity in the same newspaper wrote: “Gulf unity is the stage that we have reached and we can't go back to something less. Rivers do not go back to their source”.

One journalist even suggested that legal action be taken against the GCC administration for failing to achieve the unity promised in Article 4 of the organisation’s founding charter, specifically for its failure to meet this objective in 2013 and again in 2014. The journalist asserted that this failure gives Gulf citizens - under paragraph (1) of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the right, as the GCC’s “owners”, to demand the implementation of Gulf unity. This ownership status, the journalist claimed, authorises the citizens to take legal action against the GCC authorities for the harm caused by authorities’ failure to enforce unity to date.(8)

Reflecting on the long road
Not all writers are so supportive of a Gulf union, with some asserting that forming such a union will be more complicated than merely expressing good intentions, implying that this is all that the GCC has managed to do so far. Some argue that an uneasy mismatch exists between member states and that what happened after the Arab Spring means that the GCC cannot go back to operating as it did before.

Several such writers see the region as being on the verge of transformation that is taking place on several levels. From this perspective, Qatar is seen to occupy one corner of a triangle, with Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the second corner, and Oman and Kuwait in the third.(9) According to this analysis, the space between the countries symbolises the lack of trust between them, and means that unity will not be automatic. Furthermore, these writers assert, in the absence of trust between member countries, all of the GCC states, whatever their geographic size and financial needs, have developed an exceptionally strong sense of national sovereignty.
For these writers, one of the reasons for the GCC’s failure to build unity or a union to date is its inability to build trust between the member states. They argue that regardless of whatever constraints or motivating factors exist, the absence of trust makes both unity and union impossible. As one journalist writes, "In the midst of those psychological aspects, any hint of unity can be considered as an attempt to swallow the Gulf geographically. This is the major gap that has not been bridged for over 33 years, and if it remains, the GCC will stay as it is for the next hundred years".\(^{(10)}\)

This view is very close to the opinion of the former Kuwaiti information minister and lecturer at Kuwait University, Saad bin Ajmi. Commenting on Omani statements declaring the state’s refusal to join the Gulf Union, he writes: "The Omani position that rejects the establishment of the Gulf Union is a position that represents a bitter reality. The position is based on the reality that most of the decisions made at previous GCC summits have not yet been enforced".\(^{(11)}\)

Meanwhile, commenting on the withdrawal of the ambassadors of three Gulf States from Doha in March 2014, Abdullah Abdul Razzaq Bahajjaj pointed out: "People throughout the Gulf are currently confused and bewildered. Yesterday, there was a call to shift from the progress towards Gulf cooperation to Gulf Union. Today the GCC threatens to collapse. How can the public make sense of such strange and bizarre ironies? Herein lies the danger: the regimes themselves do not understand the nature of the current stage".\(^{(12)}\)

Perhaps it is not surprising that several Omani writers hold this position given that Oman’s minister of foreign affairs, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, has announced that Oman has formally refused to join a union. Similarly, while some journalists advocate union on the basis that it is the will of the people – as if the matter does not remain the prerogative of the region’s top political echelons alone – Bahajjaj writes: "One major paradox in our Arab Gulf states is that its variables are imposed by the will of the regimes and not the will of its people, as was expected during and after the events of 2011".\(^{(13)}\)

This is echoed by by Khalid al-Saleh who writes, "The desire for the unity of the Gulf states is the desire of its leaders. It seems that the GCC staff and officials who took responsibility for following up this unity, have not managed, or were prevented from planning, to successfully disseminate a Gulf unity culture among our peoples".\(^{(14)}\)
Al-Saleh then called on the GCC to develop a strategy to make Gulf unity a "firm and popular objective".

On the other hand, Qatari writer Mohammad Fahad Al-Qahtani, has attacked Saudi and Bahraini moves to press ahead with the union. Asking about the absence of public consultation on this move, he wrote:

"It is the right of peoples to self-determination, and to express their views on merger or separation. Because unity is a serious issue, we should not go into it before holding a referendum to ascertain peoples' opinions. This blackout on the question of Gulf unity – who requested it, who approved it, and whether the people are satisfied with it – proves that the reason why it has come to light at this particular time, as well as the very reasons for its existence and aspirations, is to further the agendas of these regimes, and to quell the hopes of people who might not agree with these regimes’ visions for the political future of this region".(15)

Bahraini writer and human rights activist Abdu Nabi Akri has argued that certain factors account for leaders’ enthusiasm about the union:

"Bahrain alone is enthusiastic about the Gulf Union project, in an attempt to escape from the demands of the change movement. Under political and sectarian polarisation that was deepened by the winds of the Arab Spring – the popular uprisings that began in Bahrain on 14 February 2011, in Oman on 25 February 25, the mass movement in Kuwait and the human rights movements in the UAE – the Gulf Union project was another controversial issue; democratic and secular opposition forces and actors see this as a project to bolster the [rulers’] grip on security".(16)

Many readers and columnists writing in Bahrain’s al-Wasat newspaper, which has a pro-opposition editorial stance, expressed similar views. Several journalists have expressed the view that the union is an attempt to strengthen the existing governments of the Gulf against popular demands expressed in 2011. Others suggest that the union would attempt to mask sectarian divisions in the region by opening a channel between Bahrain’s “Shiite lake” and the Gulf’s “Sunni sea”, submerging the smaller component in the larger one.(17)

Popular opinion direct from the public

Most Gulf newspapers are subject to official censorship, and do not freely reflect local public opinion. According to the Reporters without Borders’ 2014 Press Freedom Index, which surveyed 180 countries worldwide, the GCC countries rank as follows: Kuwait (91), Qatar (113), United Arab Emirates (118), Oman (134), Bahrain (163), and Saudi
Thus, guarantees of free expression regarding what is published in the press must be doubted, especially when it comes to issues on which the authorities have taken clear and explicit decisions, and mobilised their own media capacities to promote. In such cases, journalists either refrain from explicitly disagreeing with official state policy, or the news departments do the job by refraining from publishing articles that contradict state policy.

With the massive spread of new technologies that have given large numbers of citizens access to the internet and smart phones, however, social media usage is increasingly prevalent in the region. While many studies indicate that the majority of social media users are young people, this study assesses the extent to which people are expressing their views on the GCC via social media, by following the terms “Gulf Union” and “Gulf unity” on Twitter. While it would be difficult to include all views expressed under these tags, the general impression is that the comments tweeted give a fairly good sense of what Gulf Union means to average (if younger) citizens in the Gulf.

One hundred and fifty six tweets had the Gulf Union hash tag, and ninety-three had the Gulf unity hash tag. Judging from the names, aliases, and phrases used in tweets, the study concludes that most of the tweets were from people in the Gulf. By excluding the news sites and official press releases, the survey revealed attitudes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Attitudes expressed via Twitter on Gulf unity and a possible Gulf Union

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>#Gulf_Union</th>
<th>#Gulf_unity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolute supporter</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative supporter</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical opposition</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynical</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions and advertising</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously, “Tweeters” do not necessarily base their attitudes on logical, scientific, historical or factual arguments. Many of the tweets were single words or short statements. A large segment of union supporters sent prayers or wishes of good luck encouraging the GCC leaders to make progress towards union, or reviling the Safawi, the Persians, Americans, or others they perceive as enemies.

Opponents were mostly pessimistic about the possibilities of the union “tightening the security grip”, “burying the dreams of the people” and “repressing the revolution’s demands”. Most of the reservations expressed focused on the importance of the role and
opinion of the peoples of the region, the harmonisation of legislation, and the disparities in the economic statuses of the various member states.

Both tags drew sarcastic comments on issues such as: the GCC countries’ failure in international sports competitions or low ranking in other fields; the conditions at various border posts and the ways in which travellers are treated by different countries; the sharp income disparities between citizens of the member states, and the impact of this on the ways in which environmental disasters and climate change affect the poorer peoples more than others.

It should also be added that promotional and advertising campaigns for products and services often included these two tags, and a good number of tweets that had nothing to do with the issues seem to have been published by those hoping to increase their followers’ numbers.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of this assessment of unofficial public opinion on the question of establishing a Gulf Union, it is clear that journalists and the news media lack independence. The old saying that the “media mirrors society” is certainly true in the sense that the news media are politically and financially dependent on state authorities (with the possible exception of Kuwait where media freedom is valued more than in the other GCC countries).

The region has gone through dozens of previous incidents where newspapers and journalists condemn and denounce a particular party in tandem with or in advance of official state channels. Then, if relations between the two parties improve, the same writers and newspapers go back to praising both sides, emphasising bonds of fellowship and commonality.

It is not wise to rely too much on social media to provide an accurate mirror on society, as it is still in an early stage of development. While it is true that social media played significant roles in critical situations such as in Bahrain in 2011, it is also true that social media sites quickly became new, virtual battlegrounds in the war between the two opposing sides, and were used relentlessly with no holds barred.

Based on an analysis of views expressed via both traditional and new media, it is possible to conclude (although the validity and accuracy of such a conclusion are not absolute) that establishing a union consisting of the GCC countries is imperative. In my
view, the notion of such a union should be evaluated in relation to its impact on particular rights, on minorities, and the gains to be made by each country. What is certain, however, is that if a union is to succeed, its seeds need to be sown at the grassroots level in order for it to flourish, rather than its being imposed from on high, as though it were possible to begin building a house from the roof downwards.

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2. Al-Shihabi, Ghassan (2014). The Distance Between Bahrain and Iran: Inhaling Tension, 26 August, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. [http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2014/08/20148269273403263.htm](http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2014/08/20148269273403263.htm)

3. King Abdullah’s speech is quoted in the Saudi newspaper, Al-Riyadh of 20 December 2011, see [http://www.alriyadh.com/693340](http://www.alriyadh.com/693340). All translations in this chapter are by the author.


5. My review included a search for columnists who write for the following newspapers: in the UAE – Al-Bayan, Al-Khaleej; in Bahrain – Al-Ayam, Al-Wasat, Akhbar Al-Khaleej; in Oman – Al-Shabeeba, Al-Watan; in Qatar – Al-Raya, Al-Watan, Al-Arab; in Kuwait – Al-Qabas, Al-Watan, Al-Seyasa; in Saudi Arabia – Al-Riyadh, Al-Youm, Okaz. However the search function on most of these newspapers’ websites were either very rudimentary or not working.


8. Al-Ajmi, Zafar Mohammad (2014). Failure to Establish the Union Opens the Door to Prosecute GCC, Al Arab (Qatari newspaper), 12 March

9. Al-Rahbi, Mohammed bin Saif (2014). Summer Cloud...is a Gulf Cloud, Al Shabeeba (Omani newspaper), 12 March


13. Ibid.


15. Al-Qahtani, Mohammad Fahad (2012). The Gulf Unit, Al-Arab (Qatari newspaper), 16 May

17. See for example, the comments made about the views of Salafist scholar Adel Al Ma’awdh, who declared that the Gulf Union would be established by mid-2013: http://www.alwasatnews.com/3756/news/read/724266/1.htm, as well as the comments on an Al Wasat editorial titled ‘The idea of the Union’ published on 14 May 2012: http://www.alwasatnews.com/3537/news/read/662923/1.html.

Gulf Cooperation Council's Economic Cooperation and Integration: Achievements and Hurdles

Dr. Khalid Shams Abdulqader *

Abstract

In this chapter, the author reviews the history of economic cooperation and integration between member states within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It chronicles the GCC’s most significant achievements in this regard, including establishing a customs union, and the progress made towards introducing a single GCC currency. Then, it outlines the major obstacles that stand in the way of full economic integration across the six member states.

After the obstacles, the chapter examines the factors that motivate the GCC states to operate as an economic conglomerate rather than independently. Such factors include their geographic proximity, and shared customs and traditions. This chapter argues that their shared culture has given rise to similar legislative frameworks, thus facilitating the development of integrated regulatory frameworks, and enabling economic and financial integration.

Despite this, the GCC’s progress towards integration has been relatively slow, even though the political and popular support for it has been reasonably strong. Deeper
integration would undoubtedly contribute to member states achieving the aims and aspirations outlined in the GCC Charter, enhancing economic prosperity and benefitting both the larger and less influential member states. One way of furthering this agenda, and of establishing the distinction between the GCC’s political and economic goals, would be to distribute the offices of the GCC’s institutions more widely across the member states.

**Introduction**

The GCC was established in May 1981 as a regional bloc including six member states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Besides their geographical proximity, several factors facilitated the formation of the GCC, including shared customs, traditions and language, similar economic resources and activities, similar environments, and similar political systems (monarchies). The GCC aims to achieve comprehensive integration among its member states, with the ultimate goal being union. Article 4 of the GCC Charter states that the GCC aims to achieve coordination, integration and interconnection among member states’ economic, social, educational, research, cultural, legislative, and transport fields, and to develop compatible systems so that unity can be achieved.(1)

Through the GCC, the member states aim to form an effective economic bloc. Economic blocs elsewhere in the world have been formed by bringing different economies together under a single framework or set of principles governing how they deal with one another and with other countries. Member countries tend to choose their own level of participation within the bloc, ranging from partial integration to full union.

Integration usually begins with free-trade zones in which goods and services are exempt from customs and tariffs. If this is successful, a customs union is established, whereby participant states establish a common policy on international trade tariffs. The third level would be a joint market, where the means of production – including labour and capital – are able to move freely between member countries. After this comes the fourth level, where full cooperation in all economic, financial and fiscal policies occurs, and in which institutions, legislation and economic standards are set up for the next level – a common currency, which crowns the efforts of the member countries.

Economic blocs tend be set up between countries that have varied economic capabilities. For example, signatories to NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) have varying production costs, with the agreement enabling manufacturing companies to migrate from higher-cost to lower-cost regions, thus benefitting from cheap labour and production resources where these are more abundant.
As for the GCC, the factors that make integration a preferable option far outweigh those that might encourage the member states to remain independent. Geographical proximity is a major factor: the member states’ resources are close enough to channel into their industries, and their similar customs and traditions have produced similar legislative and administrative processes.

Despite the fact that their economic similarities centre on the production and export of oil, most of the GCC’s oil production is exported. Thus, competition between the member states for global oil sales is negligible. It should be pointed out that, via agreements on energy cooperation, the member states have given one another priority in relation to supplying their own energy needs. Thus all six states exchange crude oil, natural gas and petrochemicals in order to fulfil their respective local demands.

It doesn’t hurt that the economies of the GCC states have similar industries that might otherwise lead to competition between member states, with these similarities enhanced by the economic openness, especially given free trade agreements between them. An open economy promotes competitiveness, efficiency, innovation and, in some cases, convergence, making consumers the ultimate winners because competition keeps prices down and products diverse.

This chapter assesses the GCC’s progress towards complete economic union, which forms a key aspect of the GCC Charter, and covers both the GCC’s achievements in this area and the obstacles that have slowed it down.

**Towards full economic integration**

Economic unity makes the GCC an economic force to be reckoned with. As shown in the tables at the end of this chapter, in 2013, with an aggregate GDP of $1.62 trillion, the combined economy of the GCC states was ranked twelfth in the world in terms of size.\(^{(2)}\) In terms of foreign trade in 2013, the GCC economy was rated fifth in the world, with US $1.42 trillion worth of trade exchange.\(^{(3)}\) At US $921 billion in 2013, the GCC was the world’s fourth largest exporting nation after China, the US and Germany, with most of its exports consisting of crude oil, gas, and petrochemical derivatives. In terms of import value, the GCC came tenth globally at $514 billion in 2013. These figures indicate how much bargaining power the GCC has in the global economic arena, and how attractive the region is to foreign investment.\(^{(4)}\)

The GCC’s ambitious economic integration project dates back to the very beginnings of the organisation. In November 1981, the GCC leaders signed an agreement on economic
unity in Riyadh, laying out a comprehensive framework and timeframe for economic integration. Among the many aspects covered by the agreement were: regulating capital flows; the cross-border movement of individuals; cooperation around issues of transport, trade, technology and development, as well as financial and fiscal cooperation.

In December 2001, the GCC leaders ratified an updated version of this agreement at their summit in Muscat. The updated document included articles that were more in keeping with national and international economic trends, facilitating the formation of the GCC’s customs union, a joint GCC market, and the yet-to-be-instituted common currency. The 2001 agreement thus constituted a vital advance in the GCC’s progress towards full economic integration.

By March 1983, work had commenced on establishing a free-trade zone, one of the elements of a customs union. It was decided that local products and services would become fully tax and tariff exempt within the GCC, while each of the six states would maintain its own customs policies towards the rest of the world. After the updated agreement was ratified in 2001, the member states agreed to launch their customs union by January 2003, and to establish the accompanying databases and interconnectivity, so that they could keep track of the movement of goods and services, as well as of the GCC’s affairs in general.

In addition to the exemption of local products and services, a unified customs tariff of 5 per cent was made mandatory on all imports into the GCC. It was agreed that goods produced by member countries would not be subject to transit regulations when passing through other GCC nations, while non-GCC goods in-transit, would be treated as such only at the first entry point with no need to repeat procedures at subsequent inter-GCC crossing points. The agreement also freed GCC citizens from requiring customs clearance when moving between any of the six states. It was also agreed that the standards and measures related to trading in goods in each country would be considered mutually acceptable until a single set of common standards and measures could be put in place.

By the end of 2008, the GCC states had successfully established a customs union with streamlined procedures, customs legislation, and standards. In the same year, the member states agreed to move to the next level by establishing a joint market. This would require not only the elimination of all customs restrictions on the movement of goods between the six states, but also the removal of restrictions on the movement of capital and individuals. This meant that all GCC citizens would be allowed to own property and do business in any of the six states, while being treated like any other natural-born citizen of these states.
With this accomplished, the next step is monetary union through the adoption of a common currency, an objective that the GCC’s supreme council had been discussing since 2000. In 2001, the member states agreed on a timeframe that included pegging their currencies to the US dollar, and aiming to launch their common currency in 2010. By 2002, the local currencies of all six member states had been officially pegged to the US dollar.

Taking a leaf out of the European Union’s book, the GCC states laid down several economic standards required for economic integration under a common currency. The standards underline the need for every state to maintain key economic indicators at or above certain levels, and stipulate (among other things) that:

- National debt should not exceed 60 per cent of a given state’s GDP.

- The national budget deficit should not exceed 3 per cent of a state’s GDP.

- National inflation should not exceed 1.5 per cent of the average inflation of all member states combined.

- Long-term interest rates should not exceed 2 per cent of the average interest rates of all the GCC member states combined.

In 2005, the GCC agreed to establish a fiscal council that would later become a GCC central bank. However, things got a little more difficult after 2005, when a series of events dampened enthusiasm for a common currency. In 2007, citing the considerable fluctuations in the value of the US dollar as problematic, Kuwait rescinded the pegging of its currency to the dollar, and chose instead to peg it to a currency basket, while pointing out that this included an option for them to peg their currency against the dollar again in future if they chose to do so. In January 2007, Oman declared that its economy was unable to achieve the requirements for a common currency, and unilaterally announced that it would postpone joining the common currency, leaving other, more ready member states to proceed. The strongest blow to the common-currency project came in 2009 when the UAE decided to withdraw from the project entirely when its request to host the headquarters of the GCC central bank in Abu Dhabi (instead of in Riyadh as had been planned) was declined.

By early 2010, the common-currency debate was still in full swing. The GCC’s fiscal board held its first meeting in Riyadh in March 2010, during which the board members agreed to postpone the launch of the common currency until 2015. This marked the...
beginning of a critical phase for assessment of the preparedness of the four countries which remained committed to the project to adopt and communise a common currency. In addition, it was agreed that Oman’s readiness to rejoin the project would be studied, as would the issues arising from the UAE’s demand to host the GCC central bank. Recommendations are due to be made based upon the results of these assessments at some point in 2015, after which a decision will be made about whether to launch the currency this year or postpone it to a later date.

Progress towards economic integration: achievements and hurdles

There is no questioning the fact that the establishment of the customs union and the joint market, as well as the accomplishments to date towards introducing a common currency, are achievements in and of themselves. That said, there is no denying that more than three long, hard decades later, this rather elusive economic bloc has yet to fully materialise. This may seem strange given that the economies of the GCC were probably better suited to fast-tracking an economic union than the European Union, which crowned its 42-year gestation period by issuing the euro in 1999. (Initially known as the European Economic Community, the EU has always had more, as well as more vastly dissimilar, members than the GCC. When the euro was first issued, eleven European countries chose to adopt it as their national currency. By 2015, that number had grown to eighteen.)

This section will outline what has been accomplished in the interests of economic cooperation between the GCC states on a number of important fronts.

Common trade activities

Perhaps the GCC’s greatest achievement to date has been its success in invigorating trade among its member states, via the customs union and the joint market. Merely getting this far was sure to have a positive impact on mutual trade. As shown in the tables at the end of the chapter, almost $100 billion in trade took place between member states in 2013. This is seven times greater than it was in 2000, before the launch of the customs union. Despite this dramatic growth, however, mutual trade still represents a mere 7.1 per cent of the aggregate foreign trade conducted by the six member states.(7)
There are some very good reasons why mutual trade between member states has not grown further to date. One challenging factor is that although the customs union is now long established, mutual trade is still hindered by lengthy, time-consuming customs procedures at border entry points, especially at land-based border crossings.

An essential element in the growth of mutual trade is a well-developed, transport network capable of facilitating the rapid and efficient movement of goods and cargo between states. A good transport network would include roads, seaports, airports and railways. Unfortunately, the road infrastructure across the GCC is still weak, poorly maintained and poorly serviced. Some road projects connecting GCC countries which should already be fully operational remain stuck at the stage of feasibility studies or designs that have yet to be completed. In addition, an inter-state railway project, ratified by the GCC’s supreme council in 2003, which was supposed to be up and running by 2018, has yet to see the light of day. A good transportation network would go a long way towards cutting transport costs and contributing to the stability and balance of the GCC’s common market.

In 2007, the region’s construction industry experienced some pricing anomalies that were made more serious by shortages of key materials such as concrete, cinder blocks and construction steel. An effective transport network (be it a railway or an advanced highway network) would have allowed companies to transfer materials from manufacturers to those locations where the shortages were most severe, thus helping to meet local demand and protect against inflation.

By contrast, some truly commendable strides have been made in air transport, with the GCC having one of the world’s most active aviation networks. Thanks to its advantageous geographical position between East and West, the GCC states have become a refuelling hub for many of the world’s airlines.

The GCC countries have also agreed to increase the number of flights between their capitals and major cities, allowing their national carriers to sell tickets directly in all GCC states, without the need for local agents or sponsors. These measures have helped to boost the movement of people, baggage and other cargo, bolstering business, as well as strengthening family ties, travel and tourism. Dynamic aviation activity has also led to an increase in the number of airports and justified the expansion of existing ones.
The role of the private sector

Despite hopes that the private sector would be an engine of commercial and investment exchange within the GCC, its contribution to the GDP of the six member states still falls far short of the levels hoped for. The private sector’s capabilities in relation to innovation, especially in terms of producing globally competitive brands, institutions or services, are considered meagre at best. While some goods produced by the private sector, such as dairy and other agricultural products, have been remarkably successful, internal weaknesses combined with poor transport and other infrastructure, have prevented private sector firms from contributing more to economic activity and mutual trade between member states.

Additionally, the disproportionately large role played by the government sector in GCC member states’ economies has attracted far too many citizens, giving them incomes that compete with, or even exceed, what they would be likely to earn in private businesses or as entrepreneurs. This has been going on for far too long, creating a situation in which much of the private sector consists of small and medium-sized businesses that are run and managed by foreigners, and whose activities focus on importing goods and services that are too poor in quality to compete globally. These enterprises rarely display even a modicum of innovation, partly because of limited capital, and partly because of their total reliance on imports for retail sales.

On this issue, the GCC has focused mainly on eliminating obstacles that hamper private sector growth in member states. For instance, the GCC set 2003 as the year in which all obstacles preventing GCC citizens from owning stock and establishing enterprises in any GCC state would be removed. Nevertheless, few businesses enter into partnerships or establish branches in other GCC states. Most business partnerships are still confined to capital investments and channelled towards stock market investments, with a dearth of partnerships, alliances and affiliations aimed at forming industrial conglomerates that could compete regionally and globally.

Although several initiatives to jumpstart business leadership in member states have been established, the GCC has yet to adopt a GCC-wide business-leadership programme. However, in November 2014, a business-leadership council was established in Riyadh, and much is expected from this.

The integration of financial markets

The GCC’s economic agreements encourage the integration of financial markets and the standardisation of the policies, laws and regulations governing them. Each member state
has its own official primary and secondary financial markets (stock exchanges) that deal in financial instruments such as stocks, bonds, investment and hedge funds. The GCC’s general secretariat, and the regulatory bodies linked to the financial markets in each of the member states, are engaged in ongoing discussions about standardising the regulations governing stock and bond offerings, investment funds and levels of disclosure, as well as about legalising reciprocal stock offerings between GCC states.

A committee comprising the heads of capital-market authorities from each of the member states has drafted a set of standardised rules and regulations to assess how well these fit with the capital markets in their respective countries, which could be used until a fully integrated system is in place. This committee is also working with the governors of the member states’ central banks to find ways to bolster regulatory and monitoring systems so as to guarantee the financial security and integrity of those markets. Work is also underway to maximise economic development by boosting the GCC states’ abilities to attract investment and create opportunities for investors in various enterprises.

That said, progress has been slow. IPO markets – in which initial public offerings (IPOs) are used to raise funds for emerging and existing enterprises – are still very loosely interconnected. Although some GCC countries allow citizens of other member states to own IPO shares in their companies (such as Qatar’s Al Rayan Bank and the UAE’s Dana Gas), there is still very little opportunity for GCC citizens to own shares in out-of-state companies. The situation is no better in investment-fund markets. As for secondary-trading markets (stock exchanges), certain listed companies can be co-traded between certain GCC states; thus the stock exchanges of Dubai and Qatar can trade shares in companies such as telecommunications company Ooredoo or the Alsalam Aircraft Company. Additional freedom in such trading would almost certainly enhance economic integration and stimulate trade within the GCC.

Making progress in this direction, Qatar has given all GCC citizens the same rights as Qatari nationals to own shares in Qatari companies, thus giving GCC citizens an advantage over foreign investors. In addition, Qatar has raised the maximum percentage of shares that non-Qataris can own in Qatari enterprises from 25 to 49 per cent.

The GCC database
The quality and comprehensiveness of statistical data enhances the efforts of any state to standardise systems, practices, regulations and policies. Although the GCC’s general secretariat has a database that gathers, tallies, collates and documents all manner of
economic, social, cultural, environmental and other data within the GCC, the availability of the more detailed longitudinal data could be improved. Researchers’ lack of access to such data tends to impact badly on the quality of studies conducted and/or published in the GCC, as well as on the identification and solving of problems, and the prediction of future trends. Far too often, researchers find themselves having to draw on data from external, international sources about their own countries. Statistics-collection bodies in each of the six member states’ would benefit from more attention and investment, and statistical standards should be reviewed and standardised – ideally all six states should adopt international standards, making it easier for analysts to compare data and track specific variables in relation to global trends.

Political will

It can hardly be said that the GCC leaders lack the political will to achieve economic and political unity. The GCC would not have come about in the first place, much less continued to function, if the political will did not exist. Throughout the history of the GCC, no member state has ever barred the flow of goods and services, or restricted the movement of individuals from other member states, despite the occurrence of several political disagreements between states – including territorial disputes or issues relating to the foreign policies of one or other state. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that such disputes have played a role in delaying or obstructing certain GCC agreements.

To eliminate such political and economic loopholes, increased coordination between the member states is necessary. For instance, benefits and wealth should be distributed among member states in a way that is fair to the countries that have more economic clout, while increasing the benefits for those countries with less economic power. For example, the premises and headquarters of GCC institutions could be distributed across the member states and each member state could be accorded importance based on whatever the country excels in. For instance, Bahrain has financial status, the UAE has tourism and exports, Saudi Arabia has oil, Qatar has gas, Oman has its breath-taking wilderness and an edge in terms of labour resources, and Kuwait has the most experience in relation to global investments.

The GCC is perfectly capable of preventing political dynamics from undermining what it has achieved so far in terms of economic integration. For example, the recalling of ambassadors from Qatar in 2014 could have been an unprecedented setback for the GCC and its economic achievements but, in time, the GCC proved its ability to resolve internal differences in ways that have no impact whatsoever on the member states’ economic affairs. The return of the various ambassadors to Doha was a political success that
proved that the GCC is more than capable of containing and satisfactorily resolving even serious disputes.

**Conclusion**

The GCC was born in the early 1980s, but it can be argued that it only commenced its work in earnest in 2001, when the member states began to focus on achieving economic integration through forming a customs union and a joint market. Efforts are still underway to achieve the ultimate goal, a common GCC currency, and progress towards integration has been relatively slow. Nevertheless, the political and popular will to press on remains strong, and although some hurdles remain, a great deal has already been achieved towards meeting the hopes and aspirations of GCC nations, as expressed in the GCC Charter.

### Tables

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<td>8141.18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>777.67</td>
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<td>1481.28</td>
<td>2629.5</td>
<td>1692.18</td>
<td>777.67</td>
<td>279.16</td>
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<tr>
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<td>456.4</td>
<td>5050.85</td>
<td>1267.04</td>
<td>385.55</td>
<td>279.16</td>
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**Total** $14,344.11 $20,444.96 $26,789.77 $21,476.02 $5,378.51 $6,982.60

**Total (ALL)** $95,415.97

All tables compiled by the author, using data obtained through a Bloomberg LP subscription

### GCC Intra-Regional Trade (Millions of Dollars, 2000)

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<td>243.66</td>
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**Total** $707.74 $3,738.47 $3,638.23 $1,820.92 $1,247.62 $1,632.28

**Total (ALL)** $12,785.26

All tables compiled by the author, using data obtained through a Bloomberg LP subscription

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*Dr Khalid Shams Abdulqader* is a professor at the College of Business and Economics, Qatar University

1. The GCC Charter is available at [http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html](http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html)
2. All tables in this chapter were compiled by the author, using data obtained through a Bloomberg LP subscription; see [http://www.bloomberg.com/company](http://www.bloomberg.com/company).
3. The numbers in this segment were all compiled using data obtained by the author through a Bloomberg LP subscription.
4. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
Gulf Military Cooperation: Tangible Gains or Limited Results?

Dr. Zafer Muhammad Alajmi *

Abstract

The muted nature of discussions about military cooperation between the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can be attributed either to the generally covert nature of military operations or to the increasing links between military security and more than one external security command. However, it is safe to say that since the GCC was first established in 1981, the member states have succeeded in achieving a high level of strategic co-ordination on a number of levels with the aim of creating a framework for defence co-ordination.

A kind of a defence strategy has evolved in the GCC that defines the general concepts and delineates the policies that govern its defence orientations. This level of strategic planning is characteristic of great powers, whose interests, aspirations and operations extend beyond their borders. Similar international organisations or regional alliances, such as NATO, also undertake such strategic planning to define their commitments and coordinate their defence operations.

The Gulf Security Agreement, signed at the GCC’s 21st Summit in Manama in December 2000, merely affixed an official stamp on existing military cooperation. The GCC’s
combined military force, Dir' al-Jazeera (Peninsula Shield), had already long been in existence. The 2000 agreement prepared the ground for far stronger military cooperation and co-ordination. This seems to have reached a high point in 2014, and includes the formulation of a unified defence strategy and military command, the linking of anti-missile systems, and bridging capacity gaps by establishing a joint force for rapid intervention.

It seems likely that Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons, political instability in Iraq, the upheaval in Syria, the emergence of Daesh or the so-called Islamic State (IS), the advances of the Houthis in Yemen, and America’s overtures towards Tehran, all gave the GCC clear incentives to strengthen its collective defence and security systems. However, while the GCC states have moved beyond monitoring threats, and have established mechanisms that are capable of counteracting threats militarily, the greatest obstacle to security cooperation persists, namely: convincing the decision makers that the security of the region is in the interest of all nations and requires a greater military strength than their separate forces can effectively provide.

Introduction

It is interesting to note that in defining the organisation’s objectives as the promotion of cooperation and co-ordination among the member states, the GCC Charter does not specifically mention military cooperation, although it does name other fields of cooperation, including economic, finance, trade, customs, communication, education, culture, media, tourism, legislation and administration. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the GCC as a vehicle started out in 1981 as a military formation, despite being painted in the colours of the desert and carefully camouflaged to avoid attack from other warring nations in the region.

This early caution set a precedent for the later formulation of the GCC’s security doctrine. In response to the Iran–Iraq War of 1980-1988, the first-ever GCC security conference was convened on 24 February 1982. The basic principles, aims and objectives of military cooperation were agreed upon during that summit, with a view to the member states signing a comprehensive security agreement in future.

At this juncture, the need for unity and interdependence between the GCC states was clear, and collective security measures were adopted as a way of saving the smaller countries of the region from military invasion or ideological infiltration by more powerful neighbours who might have evil intent. Thus, the documents produced at the 1982 gathering reflect the GCC’s apprehensions about the possibility of imminent attack by
Iraq or Iran, and the need to collectively resist possible interference in their internal affairs.

If such apprehensions were instrumental in launching GCC’s military cooperation agenda, subsequent backtracking from this agenda can be attributed to one of two factors. On the one hand it is in the nature of military activities to be cloaked in secrecy. On the other hand, member states may have been reluctant to accept the link between the GCC’s security and wider security issues as a means of addressing the chronic power vacuum in the Gulf.

This compels Gulf observers to delve into the issue of military cooperation within the GCC with a view to analysing its tangible gains and limitations.

**Repelling external challenges**

The Gulf Security Agreement, signed at Manama in December 2000 was primarily about the GCC making the transition from co-operating on matters of defence to a position of collective self-defence. Accordingly, member states agreed that external aggression against any member would be regarded as aggression against them all; that any threat facing one state would be regarded as a threat to all, and would necessitate various measures, including the use of military force, being taken to aid the victim of aggression. The agreement also provided for the development of the Peninsula Shield, and for the enhancing of military cooperation by arranging joint military exercises, agreeing on defence policies, and augmenting the countries’ collective defence capacity by strengthening the local arms industry. In addition, it was agreed that all collaborative activities would fall under the direction and supervision of the GCC’s Supreme Council through its Defence Council’s High Military Committee, whose meetings are coordinated by the Adjunct Secretary-General for Military Affairs.

It can be argued that the structure of the prevailing world order is constituted partly by military alliances and collective security pacts such as NATO, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Gulf Security Agreement. This seems to indicate that the militarisation of the GCC is likely to remain a feature of the region, and of how it interacts with the wider world.
The Peninsula Shield: centralised command over decentralised forces

Although it may be far from perfect, the formation of the Peninsula Shield is regarded by the GCC states as the lynchpin of their collective defence agreement, and as an important milestone in Gulf military cooperation. At its third summit held in November 1982, the GCC’s Supreme Council decided to constitute a combined force composed of 5,000 soldiers drawn from the six member states. At its 26th summit held in mid-December 2005, the Supreme Council decided to expand the strength of the force and diversify its armaments. Renamed as the Peninsula Shield Force, it became a mechanised force composed of foot soldiers, armoured carriers, artillery and combat support elements. Since its inception, the force has held periodic training sessions and joint military exercises with the armed forces of each of the member states. The first such exercise took place in the United Arab Emirates in 1983. From 1986 onwards, training has been centralised at King Khalid Military City in Hufer al-Batin in northeast Saudi Arabia.

In the past, the Peninsula Shield Force has been the subject of much criticism. Characterised initially as primarily a symbolic force, it was often viewed with scepticism. The Iran-Iraq war and another conflict in 2000 led the GCC to increase the strength of the Peninsula Shield again. At their meeting in Muscat in October 2002, they re-emphasised their security concerns, and the combat readiness of the force was again reinforced in Kuwait in February 2003 amidst preparations for the war launched by the US against Iraq.

After the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime in November 2005, the Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Bin Alawi, suggested that there might no longer be any need to maintain the Peninsula Shield Force.(1)

Initially this suggestion was supported by the authorities in Riyadh, who added that each state could keep the units they had contributed to the force under their own supervision and control so that they could be recalled as required. However, by November 2006, the Saudis had changed their minds, suggesting instead that the Force be expanded and placed under a system of joint command and control. In May 2008, consensus emerged that units of the Peninsula Shield would be stationed in their countries of origin, and be reinforced with naval and air forces so as to enhance their capability. In 2009, the force was strengthened even further by the addition of a Rapid Intervention Force.
These constant changes in the status and role of the Force have, at times, created doubts about whether GCC’s military partnership was disintegrating or simply redefining itself. However, the Peninsula Force itself has proved that calls for its liquidation were devoid of any strategic sense. For example, when GCC troops entered Bahrain on 14 March 2011 to safeguard strategic key points in that country under the Collective Self-Defence Agreement, and at the request of the King, the operation was quite successful by military standards. The troops achieved their operational objective with professionalism, clarity of direction, firmness of intent, and ease of movement. By mobilising quickly, and maximising the element of surprise, they deterred the threat of a foreign takeover and restored peace and stability. For many, the success of this operation helped atone for their confused and ineffectual response to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

By 2014, the number of military personnel exceeded 30,000. These troops possess the requisite competence to take a combative role in a conflict but a number of obstacles remain in their way. For instance, the force has limited authority. The GCC has begun taking steps to rectify this by formulating a joint defence strategy and a unified command structure, which will grant the force a degree of freedom to act within an agreed framework, and without having to refer tactical matters to political decision makers. However, the diversity of views between the six member states means that this project is expected to still take some time.

**A united approach to defence strategy**

There is little doubt that the GCC’s member states have succeeded in achieving a high level of military coordination in several spheres since 1981. However, the one conspicuous shortcoming is the lack of long-term planning with all the potential complications that this would involve. Essentially, the element of strategy seems to be lacking; where then is the GCC’s strategy?

This question is posed to signal an important concern. In an organisation of different countries, it is natural that the challenges faced by each country, and therefore their respective objectives, will be different. It is difficult, however, for a unified force to strive towards a variety of different objectives. As yet, few efforts have been made to formulate common strategies for national or homeland security that would cover the political, economic, social, cultural and other aspects involved in ensuring the collective security of the member states. Similarly, operations remain confined to narrowly routine affairs rather than delving into the requirements of shared infrastructure and troop deployment, the diversification of weaponry, or the development of shared strategies.
Effective military forces find it imperative to rely on defence strategies that define concepts and policies, and, in turn, govern and determine defensive orientations. Such strategies are formulated by the world’s great powers whose interests, aspirations and actions transcend their own borders. International and regional organisations, such as NATO, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), also develop such strategies to define and coordinate defensive operations, and to guide their activities in relation to their obligations.\(^3\)

In the case of the GCC, however, the political decision-makers have maintained military cooperation for three decades without ever evolving a unified defence strategy. Indeed, this concept was not even discussed until the Kuwait summit of December 2009, when the Council resolved to adopt a unified defence strategy. Subsequently, priorities for action quickly became clear as a strategy defined the foundations and principles on which the GCC could build their capacities to repel aggression and enhance cooperation. Efforts to develop a strategy gradually strengthened the independence of the military structures, meaning that comprehensive efforts could be made to evaluate the security environment, including emerging threats, challenges and dangers.\(^4\)

### A united military command

Unity of command is the first principle of war. The subject of a united GCC military command prompted much discussion and analysis when it was placed before the closing session of the GCC’s 33rd summit in Manama on 25 December 2012. As it was, the 2012 proposal for a unified defence strategy came in the wake of the formation of a unified military command that had already achieved a number of military successes.\(^5\) Ideally, the GCC should have placed military cooperation and strategy under a separate structure, instead of spreading it across the existing structures of the general secretariat. Initially, cooperation therefore took various forms, and was organised by assorted committees, with one committee for training, a technical committee for weapons, air-force bases, naval bases, the Peninsula Shield, and various other components splintered here and there.

The creation of a joint command was a step in the right direction. It is expected that a Saudi national will be appointed to head the unified command structure, and will make Riyadh its headquarters. (If NATO’s example is followed, the position of supreme commander will belong to the country that contributes the most to the force.) This command should consist of professional officers of the highest ranks. No forces will join the command on a permanent basis but will remain stationed in their native states, being called upon as required for joint exercises or to respond to emerging threats. The
member states’ forces’ competencies and responsibilities should be defined according to guidelines approved by the GCC heads of state and their defence ministers. At the same time, the military command should be vested with real powers so that it can make assessments independently, as well as make and execute plans according to the prevailing exigencies, whether in peacetime or in war.

In any period of a state of war, the permanent command should exercise operational control over the combined forces of the GCC states, aiming to deter or repel any act of aggression. **In peacetime, it should concern itself with:**

- Evaluating possible threats.
- Envisaging and preparing response plans for various emergency scenarios.
- Co-ordinating the various forces via their commanders-in-chief.
- Offering advice on matters of military strategy.
- Acquiring weapons and surveillance equipment to enhance the capacity of the different forces to undertake joint military operations.
- Establishing and managing a centre for communications as well as joint intelligence and military operations.
- Supervising joint exercises, as well as the training and inspecting of troops.
- Ensuring the highest level of combat readiness at all times.
- Advising various forces on their readiness for war.
- Allocating the military contributions made by each member state.

**The GCC’s anti-missile shield**

The GCC states cannot ignore the threat posed by Iran’s missile arsenal. Not only does Iran possess a variety of long-range cruise missiles, it also has access to advanced ballistic-missile technologies. The current thinking in the GCC states revolves around the creation of a network of anti-missile systems capable of intercepting and shooting down any ballistic missile that targets their cities, military bases, refineries or gas and oil
pipelines. Because any threat to oil production affects the interests of North America and
Europe, the Americans and Europeans would probably rush to the aid of their trade
partners in the GCC if a missile attack occurred.

The concept of a missile shield initially developed out of the deepening ties between the
GCC and the West. The proposal first emerged after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, but
was deferred by the Khaleejis (Gulf Arabs) themselves. The idea re-emerged in 2012
amid deepening tensions between Iran and the Western powers over Iran’s nuclear
programme. It is anticipated that the major part of the Gulf missile shield would
comprise missile launchers, radar systems and American surveillance systems, which
would mostly be situated at stations in the GCC states. **However, in attempting to
establish and deploy a missile shield the following concerns have emerged:**

- The Americans first tried to market the idea of a missile shield to the Saudis, but found
  no support in Riyadh. Thereafter they touted the idea around the GCC states more
  broadly.

- Some decision makers in the GCC states remain sceptical of US claims about Iran’s
  missile capacity. They suggest that the US’s real aim is to bolster Israel’s security, and
  express apprehension about the role Israel would play in the adoption of such a missile
  shield.

- Besides the potential significant financial burden of such a missile shield on the GCC
  states, Khaleejis question the effectiveness of its adoption once the Iranian missile crisis
  is resolved and once tensions ease between Washington and Tehran. They argue that
  the illusion of an American umbrella would then quickly evaporate, and question whether
  the Khaleejis would then turn to Russia or China to strike a better deal (as the Saudis
  did when they acquired Chinese East Wind missiles in the 1980s in response to US
  pressure).

- Grandiose American missile projects have been a feature of the second half of the
  twentieth century. US reactions to the Cuban missile crisis, the Korean missile crisis, the
  elimination of mid-range American and Soviet missiles, the creation of missile shields in
  Poland, the Czech Republic and Turkey, all created international tensions and misgivings.
  Many wonder if a missile shield in the Gulf could contribute to creating a geopolitical
  climate similar to the Cold War in which a Russian–Chinese–Iranian axis is pitted against
  the US and its allies.
Russia certainly seems to see the missile shield project as being directed against it as much as Iran. Similarly, Iranian foreign minister Ahmad Wahidi has said that the missile shield forms part of a ‘Zionist–American programme’ and warned that anybody who joins it would be seen as a partner in the game being played by Israel and the US. The question remains whether the missile issue would foment even further tension between the GCC states and Iran.(6)

Pro-Iranian media have already spread rumours about differences between the GCC states regarding a united military command and the organisation’s capacity for rapid action (although it is possible to create separate commands and merge them within minutes in an emergency). Some Iranian analysts have also suggested that the GCC states are even wary of sharing information with one another because allowing the US to help them establish a missile shield would give the US access to all their data with no obligation to share information with the GCC states in return.(7)

**Bridging the capacities gap**

The sound of bombs falling on Houthi strongholds in the south of the Arabian Peninsula was heard amid escalating consternation in the Gulf at the US’s impending strategic withdrawal from the area. At the GCC’s 30th annual summit in December 2009, it was agreed that a joint rapid-intervention force would be established. The resolutions signed at the summit empowered the rapid intervention force to respond in emergencies when it is difficult to quickly move regular forces from their barracks to the centre of operations.

At that time, involvement in military operations outside the region remained outside the purview of the GCC member states, not only because it was difficult to move troops over long distances, but because of the strategic position taken by the GCC’s leaders. It is not difficult to understand the impetus for establishing the new defence unit. More recently, the IS has already outwitted the military machines of Iraq, Syria and some other areas, which has forced the GCC states to acknowledge their need for a well-trained rapid-intervention force.

Because modern warfare tends to be fought on several fronts simultaneously, it is difficult for any single GCC member state to maintain all the different kinds of forces that may be needed. Again, a combined rapid-intervention force helps to bridge this capacity gap, and solves the problem of the uneven distribution of forces across the region. Although the details of this force were not made public until recently, it is expected that special units will initially have sufficient naval and air capacity, and will expand in due
course so as to be able to engage on several fronts simultaneously. This means that they should be able to protect the oil fields and other strategic installations in difficult conditions and with sufficient strength to equal that of any enemy among their neighbouring states. Although it is premature to infer the motives and powers behind the creation of this force, it is possible to affirm that its formation is another step on the path to military cooperation between the GCC states.

**A noble goal and a clear vision**

The realisation of the goals of the GCC requires leaders with a clear vision and understanding of their mandate to expand cooperation between member states and to address any gaps that might appear. It is not surprising, therefore, that military cooperation between the member-states has gradually developed both qualitatively and quantitatively since the organisation was formed. Active cooperation remains ongoing military coordination at various levels from troop manoeuvres to military training and the development of a united military strategy.

Of course, critics are quick to raise questions and point out problems. Thus, some argue that the scarcity of human resources in the Gulf region makes the GCC’s military force a merely symbolic one, which puts it in great jeopardy. They suggest that, even in the least critical of situations, the force is likely to be rapidly immobilised and unable to defend member states. Such critics may not be aware of how much the GCC states have achieved with the aid of modern technology. Warfare today is no longer about a handful of soldiers firing traditional guns. The GCC states possess exceptionally advanced military technologies, and rank second in the world after only NATO in terms of weaponry.

If the member states suffer from a human resources deficit, they could address this by deploying retired military experts (after all, expertise never retires), by conscripting young men and women, or by opening admission to the Peninsula Shield Force to volunteers, encouraging young citizens to enlist in defence of their nations and peoples.

The GCC member states’ military cooperation is partly obstructed by the lack of clarity as to the source of the threats they are likely to face. Some member states see danger in the border disputes that arise between GCC states from time to time. The solution to these differing perceptions lies in raising awareness about the common threats faced by all the GCC members. In the past, events such as the Iran–Iraq war and the invasion of Kuwait helped to increase this kind of heightened awareness. At present, Iran’s nuclear
ambitions, the political conflict in Iraq, the situation in Syria, the rise of the IS, and the US’s overtures towards Iran, are all serving a similar purpose.

Another obstacle to stronger military cooperation is that member states tend to be excessively attached to the idea of state sovereignty. When achieving military cooperation impinges on the sovereignty of certain states, it is clear that not all the member states entirely trust the notion of Khaleeji unity and fraternity. Perhaps, however, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, more people have been persuaded of the importance of military cooperation.

The GCC states also lack a common policy on arms acquisition. It has been argued that securing arms from a diverse range of suppliers can be an advantage, and that reliance on a single source might create an unhealthy sense of dependency. However, the standardisation of light weaponry across the GCC states would enhance economies of scale. Likewise, at a logistical level, uniform storage practices, markings, and identifying symbols would help to prevent problems related to the transfer of military equipment between member states. At present, the armouries of the GCC countries contain more than twenty different types of troop carrier, ten different types of tanks, and twenty-five different types of aircraft. This level of diversity is a nightmare for military planners who have to coordinate supplies and reinforcements.

**Conclusion**

A united military strategy represents a major step for the GCC states. However, it is imperative that the GCC states take similar steps operationally and formulate a common military policy to guide the manner and conditions in which military operations can be conducted. Without such a policy, there is a risk that any given military action will be right in one context and wrong in another.

Now that the GCC states have passed through the stage of monitoring threats, and are taking practical steps to meet such threats with a high degree of military professionalism, the greatest obstacle to stronger cooperation remains the inability of member states’ policymakers to transcend their narrow state-centric perspectives. Policymakers must be made to see that the security of the Gulf region has an international dimension, and that, to establish a collective security system in the region, the GCC states must assemble a force that is greater than the sum of the existing fragmented forces of their member states.

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Gulf Union: Imperative or Elective?

Dr. Yahya Alzahrani*

Abstract

As a regional organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has played a vital role in the development of all its member states and of the region as a whole. Coordination and integration has enabled all six of its member states to achieve solid economic, educational and administrative stability.

Given this reality, and the fact that the member states now face challenges that are a far cry, both in nature and in magnitude, from those that brought about the GCC’s creation in 1981, this chapter suggests that a stronger union among the six states has become a necessity rather than a choice. Such unity would create a robust entity more capable of handling challenges and threats than the six states are able to manage alone. Ultimately, a stronger union would also strengthen and augment pan-Arab unity.

In this context, this chapter outlines a number of factors that help to justify support for such a union. These include the strategic, political and economic vulnerabilities of certain member states, wayward population growth, the challenges facing the energy industry, and the advantages of enhancing a sense of unity among the citizens of the various states.
The chapter concludes a possible union is likely to be based on a vision of regional and international integration, and that a state of economic or political cooperation could be achieved through the creation of a secure regional and international framework that leaves no room for violence in conflict-resolution.

**Introduction**

Member states form a union. Inspired by the ideas of philosopher Ibn Khaldun, who proposed that prosperity is both economic and social, and that sound political and educational systems are the ultimate expressions of prosperity, the proposal drew on notions of identity and nationhood, emphasising that the Gulf states are an integral part of the Arab and Muslim world.

When the GCC was established on 25 May 1981, its first memorandum highlighted the special ties between the six nations, as well as the similarities in their forms of governance, their political and social institutions, their shared heritage and their cultural connections. With the exception of Iran, which was quick to express its doubts and reservations and objected to the idea of an Arab organisation on the west coast of the Arabian Gulf, the birth of the GCC was welcomed across the region.

In its quest to achieve this influence, one of the first steps taken by the GCC was to create a customs union. At its 23rd session, held in Qatar on 21 December 2002, the organisation announced that a customs union would come into effect on 1 January 2003. Procedures agreed to by the GCC’s Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee (consisting of the ministers of finance and economy for the six member states) were then approved.

In 1990 and 2003, the GCC overcame two severe challenges to its existence, although the first was perhaps less critical. Despite the varied ways in which they responded to the 1990 Gulf War, the GCC states were nevertheless unanimous in condemning it. In 2003, however, when the US invaded Iraq, the varied interests of the six member states, and strains caused by minor border disputes, as well as the deployment of the GCC’s joint military force (the Peninsula Shield), seemed to undermine the possibility of a real union coming to fruition.

Yet, despite these and other less serious troubles, the GCC remained intact. Continuing attempts to unify and integrate their respective systems in the quest for fuller coordination and integration seem set to enhance the developmental, economic, educational and administrative stability of member states and of the region more generally.
That said, the conditions into which the GCC was born were vastly different from those it faces today. Member states still face many developmental and economic challenges, and urgently need to diversify their economies so as to reduce their dependency on oil as their primary source of revenue.

According to the GCC’s website, 47 million people currently live in the GCC states as of 2014, and the combined gross national product (GNP) of the six member states amounts to US $1.6 trillion.(1) High population levels make it imperative for the Gulf states to diversify their economies, and to seek strategic political and economic alliances that can bolster their economic influence regionally and globally.

**Why unity has become a necessity**
A Gulf union would provide a more robust entity, capable of shouldering the burdens that individual states currently find themselves struggling to bear, and could ultimately strengthen pan-Arab unity. **Points in favour of forming a union include:**

- The strategic exposure of some member states.
- The future of the GCC’s energy industry.
- The consolidation of significant economic muscle.
- Opportunities for addressing population growth as well as the political and economic vulnerabilities of certain member states.
- The potential to foster a deeper sense of unity between the peoples of the six states.

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of such a union is regional and international integration. Economic and political cooperation would help to create a community of interests between member states and reduce the likelihood of any member state resorting to violence to resolve a conflict with any other member. As for which form of union would be best, Turki al-Harbi has argued that a confederacy would preserve the respective sovereignty of each individual state while maintaining the vision for which the GCC was conceived?(2)

Given the pace of change in the region, the Gulf states have little option but to adopt a unified political stance if they wish to confidently meet the challenges they face. One possible way to achieve this would be for the ministries of petroleum, defence and foreign affairs to merge across all six states. Further integration and joint institutions could also be beneficial. For example, a GCC supreme court could be established, while on the issue of employment priority could be given to addressing unemployment in all member states by creating databases of graduates and unemployed citizens, thus
ensuring a more efficient allocation of human resources across states. Such joint institutions and projects would strengthen the development, not only of current member states, but also of countries that might join the GCC in future.

Comprehensive security
Cooperation on security matters already enables the GCC states to better understand and address the real strategic concerns that affect the region. The security of GCC member states bolsters regional peace and social solidarity, giving all six states additional strategic and political traction regionally and internationally.

To understand how nations have traditionally secured and bolstered their security, it is useful to revisit the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and Emanuel Kant. Hobbes used the concept of a Leviathan to represent states that place the defence of their own interests at the apex of national priorities. Yet, many heads of state see themselves as rational actors who have the right to prioritise national interests (meaning national security), and to marginalise or eliminate all threats to their own sovereignty by maximising the power of the state, thus enforcing, rather than promoting, national security.

Emanuel Kant suggested that human populations can govern themselves according to moral and legal parameters, and introduced the concept of perpetual peace. According to the Dictionnaire de Stratégie (Dictionary of Strategy), this concept ties security to the highest forms of social co-operation, namely: solidarity and a collective sense of belonging.

Of course, any notion of security can be manipulated or given double meanings so as to fit specific political, social, economic and legal ends. The concept is certainly subject to global variables, as well as to the inner workings of states and what they choose to define as acceptable means of achieving political ends. The real problem is that all facets of society can be painted with a “security brush” – in such conditions, rather than developing a universal and shared understanding of what security actually means and should be based upon, the notion of security tends to be usurped by the signature atmosphere of a security state. When almost everything can be classified as a “security risk”, concerns relating to human rights tend to be quickly cast aside.

That said, it is important to note that the connection between national identity and security is crucial. A critical issue here is that the differences in the laws and liberties of each GCC state could give rise to problems and conflicts related to security issues.
Alternatively, such differences might prompt some states to expand the liberties available to their citizens.

**Identity and security in the Arabian Gulf**

If it is accepted that identity is strongly connected to security, it is possible to investigate the nature of this connection by questioning what identity is, and how it relates to security. In the context of the GCC states, various questions are relevant. For example, what is the identity of GCC states? What does it mean to be a Khaleeji (Gulf Arab)? How can this identity and an understanding of it contribute to maintaining security and safeguarding national resources?

When the GCC states are considered as a geographical unit in which identity is solidly tied to security, we can begin to think about how linguistic security pertains to geographical unity, what sovereign security means in terms of culture, and about cultural unity in a pluralistic context. It can safely be said that identity and security are key components of the behavioural patterns of individuals and groups, and also of their relationships with their rulers. As such, any weakness in identity implies a weakness in a key aspect of security.

Weaknesses in identity manifest in what Marxists and existentialists call “alienation”. Although an accepted phenomenon in cognitive psychology, alienation is by no means a purely psychological or psychopathological phenomenon; it is an existential one: the soul exists in the body, and the body exists in the world. Forms of alienation abound: religious, social, cultural, and political alienation are just a few. Perhaps the most powerful of these is religious alienation: estrangement from God can make us feel liable to disappear into oblivion – as if all our ties with the world could be severed. Likewise, social insecurity or alienation from the societal structures or institutions that should help citizens to feel safe – the type of alienation of the most concern in this chapter – is a condition in which citizens feel so out of touch with normality that, at best, they feel unconcerned or unfazed by criminality, and, at worst, lose their connection with, and sense of belonging to, society. The latter often occurs when high levels of social insecurity are combined with social and political alienation or exclusion.

This raises a few questions about how political insecurity widens the rift between citizens and states. For example, does the rapid progress made by the six GCC member states since the GCC’s inception reflect the identity of Khaleeji citizens? Is there any parity between the rapidity of change and the speed with which Khaleeji citizens adapt to
change? Does the timing of what Khaleeji citizens are witnessing in their societies belong to the period in which they feel they belong?

**Frenemies: a stairway to unity?**

The concept of the “frenemy”\(^{(4)}\) in international politics is useful in understanding the complexities of relations within the GCC, as well as the GCC’s relations with other Arab countries and Iran. In the current context, the GCC states cannot consider having any absolute enemies. Instead, the GCC states must develop and evolve strategies that maintain their own national interests, and take into account the interests of other parties, so as to avoid all-out conflicts.

**Reinforcing the GCC system: the concept of national sovereignty**

As Dr. Abdullah al-Nufaisi pointed out in his suggestions regarding the enhancing of unity and harmony within the GCC institutions, the spectre of having to give up part of their authority haunts GCC member states. This is particularly true in relation to strategic decisions. Nevertheless, member states are still striving to harness the will, the capability and determination to achieve a union that enjoys power and influence, and is capable of making joint decisions on security, economics and foreign affairs.

The GCC member states still have a long way to go in terms of integrating their laws and regulations, not to mention building the kinds of “ultra-governmental principles” that could pave the way for agreement on a pan-GCC constitution. Concrete steps toward this will undoubtedly be motivated by the quest for prosperity, and the preservation of ruling bodies on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by security threats and the need to coordinate responses to those threats.

**Inter-GCC interaction**

The near-immutability that prevailed in the GCC states before 2010 was shattered by the phenomenon known as the Arab Spring. The speed and unpredictability of change in the Arab world has shaken the collective political mind-set of GCC leaders to the core, forcing a rethinking of concepts that had previously been taken for granted, such as sovereignty, borders, and statehood.

One of the most prominent results of the Arab Spring is shaky states: the profound changes that have occurred have given rise to jenga-like towers – entities that are liable to topple as quickly as they are propped up. Some pundits have suggested that such
states might be failing rather than being born, and that their instability might pose a threat to regional nations. Citing chaos theory, these analysts argue that something as simple as birds flapping their wings in the Mediterranean could cause hurricanes in the Arabian Gulf, which is already beleaguered by numerous regional and internal threats.

In a paper titled “Saudi Arabia and Qatar in a time of Revolution”, Bernard Haykel, a professor at Princeton University and member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, discusses the challenges facing Qatar and Saudi Arabia as follows:

“The Arab Spring represents a set of challenges, the likes of which have not been seen in the Arab world for a half-century or more. Shifts underway in the Levant and North Africa have a profound effect on perceptions of governance in the Gulf, and those shifts are a potential source of threat to the GCC states’ stability. In response, Qatar has been active, building on confidence in its domestic support and its conviction that it has nothing to fear from actors like the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia has been considerably more cautious, reflecting its own diverse internal politics and the leadership’s distrust of sweeping change. Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia seek to use their wealth as an instrument of their foreign policy, shaping the external environment in order to secure their internal one. So far, they are succeeding”. (5)

On the other hand, tensions surround the Joint GCC Security Agreement, (6) which states that the security of member states is the collective responsibility of all. However, the extent to which this agreement can be activated, not only cooperatively at the internal and regional levels, but also as an instrument for pressure, is still to be determined. In attempting to address this issue, the next section outlines the constant and the variable factors that shape events in GCC countries, and present the case in favour of GCC unity, followed by an explanation of the principles that govern inter-GCC relations.

**Constant factors**

Geography is one of the most important constants in inter-GCC relations. Being a single geographical entity, the Arabian Peninsula can be neither physically torn apart nor hidden away on the geographical or political map of the Arab world. Inseparably tethered to the geographical factor is the fact that Khaleeji citizens share customs, traditions, ancestry, culture, language and religion. While various interpretations of religion have played a major role, shared Arabian human heritage is still powerful enough to override such differences.
Likewise, extended families are another significant constant. Relationships of kinship and marriage form a robust and extremely complex social web that spans the nations of the region. The Khaleeji nation is an inseparable component of the greater Arab nation, and thanks to the prevailing human factors, it enjoys ethnic homogeneity. This homogeneity cements the region’s geographical and religious unity, as well as its customs and traditions.

The common language is a major unifier in the region; a common language is a kind of glue that can literally spell the longevity or demise of nations and civilisations. What further solidifies the GCC community is a sense of shared perspectives and sentiments. This was particularly evident during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, when GCC nations adopted a common stance despite the undeniable impact this would have for the region both militarily and economically. All of these constants interact with, as well as react with, the variable factors outlined below.

**Variable factors**

With its political and military moves against GCC member states, and its relentless prevarication with its nuclear programme, Iran has to be seen as an ongoing threat. Iran’s determination to stake its claim in the region is a key motivation for its nuclear programme: Iran views its nuclear weapons capacity not only as a strategic deterrent, but also as a way of keeping up with the Joneses – in this case, India and Pakistan. On the other hand, some GCC countries are building relations with Iran, and despite the ongoing threat it poses, the issue of Iran has not been a major source of tension in the GCC.

In recent years, the world seems to have become a more dangerous place than ever before. Writing about failed and fragile states in The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All, Gareth Evans describes the types of problems that bring about such crises, and explains how states put themselves and neighbouring countries in danger by failing to resolve internal rifts. By their inability to act, such states export terrorism and extremism to their neighbours, and/or trigger a mass exodus of refugees.

The concept of security among GCC states is another important variable. As Iran gained the upper hand in military might at the expense of GCC states, indirectly aided by declining US involvement in the region, the US was rendered unable to militarily intervene in Syria, leaving that embattled country wide open to Iranian penetration and support for Bashar Assad’s regime. In response, the GCC states developed their own
varying definitions of national and regional security. Although they agreed that security had become a top priority, the ways in which each state interprets this, in terms of determining and dealing with threats, are different – with their well-known differences concerning how best to respond to the Muslim Brotherhood being a case in point.

That said, Article 7 of the Joint GCC Security Agreement attempts to contain such differences of interpretation. The agreement states that ‘ministries of interior and similar security bodies in member states are to consult in advance, and their representatives shall coordinate and unify their stances on issues on the agendas of regional and international conferences and meetings.’ Nevertheless, the varied interpretations of national security that apply all over the world(7) are mirrored in the disparities between the foreign policies of the GCC states. For now, it can be argued that the security agreement has only a relatively loose influence on each state in terms of how they deal with security threats.

Fortunately, the proverbial political weight that the GCC countries hold collectively is not heavily compromised by these differences. Their political weight manifests itself in joint institutions which affect many aspects of the daily lives of Khaleeji citizens. Citizens have reaped the benefits of numerous joint programmes linked to culture, education and healthcare, as well as to the quest to achieve consistency across institutions and legislation. This has created a popular unity that goes even deeper into their culture, and is reflected in their songs and poetry. Another good example of this occurred in November 2014 when Qatar won the 22nd Gulf Cup of Nations in Riyadh, and the Saudis showed the utmost respect for their victory. Clearly, this league of nations had amassed massive amounts of solidarity over the years.

**Challenges affecting GCC unity**

The mismatch between the rapidity of change and the pace at which society adapts to change could potentially create a political, social and economic black hole in member states. Given the social resentment caused by the huge gaps between rich and poor, and the general sense of frustration across all social classes, the question is whether this could bring about some sort of revolution.

Certain strategic issues – such as the concept of citizenship, and whether or not this should be conditionally tied to ideological tendencies – pose challenges that impact on a number of GCC institutions, including its elected councils and constitution.
Popular movements and regional forces require multi-faceted (religious, cultural, economic, social, and political) interaction, and now that some Arab revolutions have turned from being peaceful into armed struggle, this could have a negative impact on the six GCC member states. Internal reforms within the GCC states pose a definite challenge. To address chronic, flaws and shortcomings in state institutions, a lot of repair work is necessary. This, in turn requires political will, and a harnessing of elements that facilitate regional unity.

Economically, the challenge of resources – specifically energy resources – must be considered. GCC states possess some 500 billion barrels of confirmed oil reserves, and oil plays a major role in the GCC states’ economic policies. Oil remains a strategic commodity for GCC countries, and the primary source of revenue for most of them. This will greatly impact the health of GCC economies and their quest for unification, especially if the benchmark price for Brent Crude continues to drop so dramatically.

Failure or even slowness in responding to the rapid developments in countries surrounding the GCC states will leave the field wide open for the potential dissemination of many unsavoury ideas. Technology, specifically the internet, has made it virtually impossible to restrict the types and amount of information accessible to individuals no matter how numerous or innovative the firewalls might be. Communication and interaction with the world has reached previously unthinkable levels; experiences are exchanged, public opinion is rallied, decisions are made more quickly, and the world can be made aware of events no matter where they might happen. While this could present a challenge for the GCC on some levels, it can be argued that knowledge has transcended physical and political borders, and is finding its rightful place in societies and minds that are capable of building on it.

Conclusion
As has now become obvious, the interests of countries, the changes they go through, the ways in which societies interact with their governments, ever-increasing political demands, and the sheer complexity of these variables, are all deeply and inextricably intertwined. Every GCC country has internal and external issues that need to be dealt with impartially, and with the involvement of every component of the GCC community if a new social contract is to be accepted and to prove workable.

One cannot help but wonder whether a possible Khaleeji union would be a knee-jerk reaction to internal and external security concerns, or the product of a carefully considered structural, economic, political and social variables. While either response
could bring about a GCC union, the sustainability of such a union, and the resources and capabilities that each of the member states would be willing to contribute towards achieving and maintaining it, would be quite different. A union of GCC states remains a possibility, but divergence among its member states also remains strong.

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4. First used by US commentator Walter Winchell in a piece titled ‘Howz [sic] about calling the Russians our frenemies?’ in 1953, this term found its way into international relations to describe state behaviours. For more on this, see Saqr, Amal (2014). The Regression of the Friend Vs. Enemy: Duality in the World Order – Future Concepts, Future Center for Advanced Research and Studies, United Arab Emirates.
6. The US Department of Defense, for example, defines national security as ‘the art and science of developing, applying and co-ordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security’ (see US Department Of Defense 2007). The issue, however, is not about finding a definition of national security that reflects all of its complexity, but to marry national security with strategic depth when it comes to contentious issues such Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood. In such instances, the concept becomes very complex and difficult to define. For more, see: US Department of Defense (2005). Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/)
7. [http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/index142e.html](http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/index142e.html).
10. At the time of writing the price was at its lowest since 2011. See: Badawi, Tamer (2014). Gulf economies and falling oil prices, Al-Jazeera.net, 19 October 2014. [http://www.aljazeera.net/news/ebusiness/2014/10/19](http://www.aljazeera.net/news/ebusiness/2014/10/19)
Abstract

Even before its inception in 1981, regional pressures regularly pushed the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to politically reposition themselves in order to improve their geopolitical status and avoid potential threats. This chapter describes how similar geopolitical pressures informed both the initial repositioning process that led to the establishment of the GCC in 1981, and the more recent process that began in 2011 and is still ongoing. It suggests that the main motive behind any future expansion of the GCC will depend on the member states identifying other countries which share similar political and cultural values, and which have similar economies, and face similar security challenges.

Given the Arab League’s inability to provide a minimum level of political, economic, security and defence co-ordination, the chapter argues expansion is increasingly important to the GCC countries. The chapter addresses the likely determinants and patterns of future GCC expansion, arguing the opportunities and options for GCC expansion are significant, especially in relation to what is termed “functional expansion” and “strategic partnerships”.

[AlJazeera]
Introduction

Since its inception, regional pressures have made it necessary for the GCC states to regularly reposition themselves politically to enhance their geopolitical status and avoid potential threats. Indeed, it can be argued that geopolitical pressures contributed to the establishment of the GCC in 1981. Similar pressures that have emerged since 2011 have urged the GCC states to try a new repositioning strategy, which includes: adopting a more active foreign policy; consolidating existing co-ordination and co-operation programmes; and attempting to expand their membership.

The main aim of the current expansion process is to find additional member states that share the political and cultural values of the GCC, as well as similar economic conditions and security issues. Expansion is of the utmost importance to the GCC states, particularly in light of the Arab League’s inability to provide a minimum level of coordination in relation to politics, economics, security or defence issues. In this context, the GCC seems to be adopting a flexible expansion policy that does not necessarily require full membership from countries that are invited to join the council.

Repositioning then and now

The GCC was established in May 1981 in a region that was facing serious challenges. Egypt’s unilateral signing of the Camp David Peace Agreement with Israel in 1978 had led to its isolation from the Arab region in which it had long played a central role. In 1979, Iran’s revolutionary regime came to power, calling for drastic changes in the political structures and international relations of the region. The complexity of the situation increased further following the outbreak of the Iraq–Iran War in September 1980, and the strategic threat to the GCC countries was further heightened by the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan from late 1979. The GCC states certainly did not share the Soviet Union’s political values, and were alarmed at the possibility that the Soviet invasion might succeed.

In January 1980, then-US president Jimmy Carter announced that his country would regard any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Gulf region as an assault on US interests, and would repel this by any means, including military force. However, following the US’s failed invasion of Vietnam, the leaders of the Arab world were not entirely convinced that the US would be able to follow through on this commitment.

Economically, the oil boom was making the Gulf states among the richest in the region, but it was becoming clear that the Arab League was not going to play a major role in
maintaining regional security, or even in providing a minimum level of coordination in terms of developing diplomatic, political, or defence strategies.

In this context, the GCC countries felt the need to reposition themselves regionally, and to fill the vacuum created by the Arab League’s disinclination to play a stronger role. Admittedly, the joint military capabilities of each member state did not make them significant military actors in the region, but their main goal was to create a political bloc, whose members shared similar political values, economic outlooks, and security concerns, as well as strong cultural ties. Since 1981, the GCC has played a significant (if sometimes primarily symbolic) role in consolidating the position of each of the member states in the Gulf region.

Following the Arab Spring which started in 2011, a power vacuum recurred in the region. Iran still represented a major security concern for the GCC countries, with several GCC states accusing Tehran of inciting sectarian unrest in a number of Arab countries. Again, Egypt’s regional role declined as a result of the rapid political changes that occurred there, which were coupled with a sharp economic decline and unprecedented levels of political instability in some governorates. It also became clear that the political instability in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria had developed beyond the control of the Arab League. Relations between the US and some of the GCC countries were characterised by tension and mistrust after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. This mistrust deepened further when the US’s stance on the ‘Arab Spring’ was perceived as being ambiguous.

**Expansion as a tool for the regional repositioning of the GCC**

In this context, the GCC countries again felt the need to reposition themselves. While the first repositioning process led to the birth of the GCC, the second, which began in 2011, has so far consisted of three main elements.

**The first element** is the GCC countries’ collective adoption of a more assertive and active policy on tackling regional instability: the GCC states were the main party to take the initiative in relation to Yemen, as well as playing a major diplomatic and military role in the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in Libya, and they remain supporters of the Syrian opposition.(1) Moreover, the GCC states have played a key role in political developments in Egypt since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, albeit in a far less coordinated way.
The second element is the consolidation of coordination and integration within the GCC itself, especially in relation to issues relating to security and defence. Indeed, it can be argued that the GCC states have taken major steps in this regard since 2011. A security pact was signed during this period, which could potentially lead to the establishment of a common security body among the member states, and the GCC set up a common naval force, and intends to create a unified military command.(2) It can be said the call issued by the king of Saudi Arabia in December 2011, for the organisation to move "from cooperation to union", epitomised the efforts being made to strengthen cooperation, coordination and integration within the GCC. The matter is still under consideration by the GCC.

The third element is the invitation extended to Jordan and Morocco in April 2014 to join the GCC, which indicates a strong desire among member states to expand their influence.

Factors determining GCC expansion

The invitation extended by the GCC to Jordan and Morocco cannot be understood without taking regional circumstances into consideration. There are striking contextual similarities between the GCC countries’ first attempt at repositioning, which led to the establishing of the GCC in 1981, and the second one in 2011, the results of which are not yet entirely clear.

The first similarity is the absence of an effective Egyptian state within the regional Arab framework – due to Egypt’s suspension from the Arab League in 1979, and currently to the political instability it has experienced since 2011. The second similarity is Iran’s actively revisionist policies, of which the GCC countries consider themselves a major target. Iran’s revolutionary momentum in the early 1980s was a major security concern for the GCC states, while Tehran’s more recent strategic gains in the region (mainly linked to US and British occupation of Iraq in 2003) represent a renewed threat to the GCC. The third similarity is the Arab League’s inability to operate effectively in providing a basic level of diplomatic and strategic coordination for its members. This is even clearer now than it was in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The fourth similarity is the GCC’s lack of confidence in the US’s commitment to maintaining the existing balance of power in the Gulf region.

Despite the four similarities, there is at least one fundamental difference between the GCC countries’ recent attempts at repositioning compared with those made in the 1980s. When the GCC was established in 1981, the six member states were very wealthy, but
also suffering from low levels of education, industrialisation and urbanisation among their respective populations. Thus, it can be argued that the establishment of the GCC was a defensive move, with member states aiming to create a mechanism that could protect them from the problems affecting the surrounding region, which was then politically troubled and economically weak. In 2011, the GCC’s repositioning, including its attempt to incorporate new members, seems to have been motivated by far more than defensiveness. On the contrary, its desire to expand indicates a shift towards openness, and an intention to impact directly on the wider Arab region. In other words, the establishment of the GCC in 1981 led to the creation of a sub-regional entity within the wider Arab region, while the current repositioning attempt is reflective of a bid to create a new centre of gravity, influence and control within the Gulf region, and more broadly among the other Arab states.

To demonstrate the importance of the four similarities outlined above as factors that continue to affect the position of the GCC and its relations within the region, it is useful to compare the two repositioning attempts to the events following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In the wake of the Iraqi invasion which came as an extreme shock to the GCC, the organisation attempted to reposition itself by creating an alliance with Egypt and Syria through what was known as the ‘Damascus Declaration’ of 1991. Needless to say, the Declaration did not evolve into a viable strategic partnership between the GCC, Egypt and Syria, nor has it led to the expansion of the GCC in any way.

Indeed, the four factors that contributed to the GCC’s repositioning in 1981 and 2011 did not come into play in 1991. At the time of the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, Egypt had regained its regional centrality and its pivotal role among the regional Arab nations – albeit short-lived. Iran had emerged from its eight-year war against Iraq, with its revolutionary zeal exhausted and its regional role under siege. The Arab League was demonstrating a considerable degree of efficiency in co-ordinating interactions among Arab countries. And the US had succeeded in confirming its commitment to maintaining the status quo in the region through its full military involvement in the Gulf War. Thus it can be argued that the GCC countries had no real need to reposition themselves regionally, and for that reason, the Damascus Declaration remained a temporary, tactical and short-lived alliance.

**GCC expansion patterns**

With reference to the history of the GCC, it is possible to discern three distinct patterns in the ways in which the GCC relates to other countries in the region.
The first is “functional expansion”. The GCC resorts to this with countries that do not share its political values, but which are of strategic, social or economic importance. In these cases, the GCC tends to include countries in events, organisations, bodies and committees to which it is affiliated, while engaging them in primarily functional relationships. This pattern can be said to apply to the GCC’s relations with Iraq in the 1980s, and Yemen in the contemporary era.

The second pattern is “strategic partnership”, which indicates the existence of a reciprocal commitment between the GCC states and a partner country, with both sides providing various kinds of support as needs arise. The political values of the states invited into this type of partnership are not necessarily similar to those held by the GCC. However, their commitment tends to remain in the realm of “moral support” rather than developing into deep and binding institutional obligations. This pattern applies to the GCC’s current relations with (for the time being at least) Jordan and Morocco. It is likely that the GCC’s relations with Yemen will shift from functional to strategic if Yemen stabilises politically. The flexibility of these types of arrangements means that other Arab countries, such as Iraq and Egypt (which were included in the Damascus Declaration), and even non-Arab countries, such as Pakistan, can be included.

The third pattern is “political expansion”, that is, full accession by a new member to the GCC. This would require a country not only to hold similar political values to those of existing members, but also to have similar cultural, economic and social structures. In the context of the GCC’s invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the Council, priority seems to have been given to the political values shared by the various states.

**The priority of similar political values: inviting Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC**

It is important to note that sharing a common political space does not necessarily mean that the political, cultural, economic and security systems of all the GCC states have to be identical or generic. However, potential new member states do have to agree with the fundamental political values on which membership of the Council are based. These include maintaining the region’s status quo, and adopting a gradual approach to reform while giving priority to the modernisation of members’ economic, social and administrative sectors. In other words, the basic criteria for expansion is the sharing of political values, not political systems.
Many analyses of the reasons behind the invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC tend to focus on two main factors. The first is that Jordan and Morocco were invited to be GCC members out of a desire to consolidate military cooperation between them and the current GCC member states. It is true that both Jordan and Morocco have cooperated with the GCC states in recent years – sharing military trainers and advisors or conducting joint military exercises. In fact, during the Gulf War, Morocco sent a few thousand troops to Saudi Arabia. However, an in-depth analysis reveals that the military capabilities of Jordan and Morocco are not sufficient to enable them to sustain a significant military deployment outside their borders. In addition, the combined military strength of the existing GCC members has developed remarkably over the past two decades, as indicated by specialist reports, such as the annual Military Balance reports issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The second factor cited by analysts as being behind the invitation to Jordan and Morocco is that the current member states wanted to prevent troubles from occurring in ‘monarchies’ that fall outside of its ambit. This theory does not really hold water as the kingdoms of Morocco and Jordan have suffered from continuous political instability and economic hardship for most of their modern political histories yet the GCC had never before felt it necessary to invite them into the organisation. Furthermore, providing direct or indirect economic support to these two countries does not require their incorporation into the council.

On the other hand, many analysts overlook the strategic and diplomatic burdens that may face GCC states if Jordan and Morocco do join the council. The inclusion of Jordan would create an overland link between the GCC states and Israel, which would force member states to adopt a new political and defence strategy. Also, Jordan’s involvement in the Palestinian question – through its oversight of Islamic holy sites in Al-Quds, and its hosting of millions of Palestinian refugees – would require the GCC’s engagement with this issue in ways that member states may not be prepared for. Similarly, Morocco’s joining the GCC would involve the GCC states directly in issues related to Morocco’s relations with Western Sahara, and thus with both overt and covert disputes with the United Nations, Algeria and Spain, which could drag the GCC into awkward diplomatic confrontations.

By overlooking the factor of similar political values, analysts have tended to focus on non-determining factors to explain the reasons behind the invitation to Morocco and Jordan to join the GCC. It seems clear that the invitations were driven mainly by the similar political values shared by all the states, and indicate that the GCC feels that
these are strong enough to overcome any difficulties that Jordan and Morocco’s respective acceptances of the invitations may create for the GCC.

**Conclusion**

The GCC countries are gradually making progress towards becoming a centre of gravity, influence and control in the Arab region. The fact that the Arab League remains unable to play an effective role, seems likely to further expand the GCC’s options and opportunities, particularly when it comes to functional expansion and strategic partnerships.

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1. For more details, see:


   Also: Results of the GCC Summit: Customs Union, Naval Force, Support to al-Sisi and Hadi, and condemnation of Daesh and Al-Nusrah, CNN.

3. The full text of the declaration can be found here:


6. In fact, the invitation of Jordan to the GCC dates back to 2001. See: Al-Majali calls on Jordan to join the GCC, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat issue 8266.

7. Although the Final Communiqué following the fourth Joint Ministerial Meeting between GCC Foreign Ministers and their counterparts from Morocco and Jordan included the assertion and support of the “Serious and Credible Autonomy Initiative launched by the Kingdom of Morocco as a basis for negotiations in order to reach a final solution to the regional conflict on the Moroccan Sahara”, the Final Statement of the Doha Summit was devoid of any reference in this regard.

See: Final Communiqué of the Foreign Ministers of the GCC, Jordan and Morocco affirmed cooperation in combating terrorism, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, issue 13147:
The crisis symbolised by the withdrawal from Doha of the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Bahrain in March, 2014, was the first of its kind since the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and therefore set a precedent in terms of dispute resolution between the six member states. The disagreement that sparked the ambassadors’ withdrawal was among the most serious in recent years, and threatened to seriously undermine relations between the GCC states. The crisis certainly affected the GCC negatively at first – raising questions among member states, revealing shifts in their political agendas, and changing the balance of power in the region to some extent.

This chapter discusses causes of the crisis, and a review of its development and eventual resolution with the signing of the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement on 16 November 2014. This chapter suggests that the crisis will continue to affect the GCC in future. While the immediate crisis has passed, the loss of trust between the GCC states is likely to take some time to resolve. Nevertheless, the resolutions that emerged from the 35th GCC summit held in Doha on 9 December 2014 indicate a kind of convergence in understanding among the GCC countries on a number of regional issues. This
convergence was arrived at in the context of various regional pressures on the member states and the Gulf region as a whole, stemming particularly from concerns around the emergence of the Islamic State and Iran’s nuclear programme. Finally, the chapter argues that resolution of the crisis is indicative of the maturity of the GCC states, and reflects their ability to focus on prioritising their own local interests. In the longer term, it seems likely that this maturity will enhance integration and strengthen the GCC.

Introduction

Some might think that the rift between Qatar on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on the other, ended with the return of ambassadors to Doha a few days before the GCC’s 35th Summit meeting held in Qatar on 9 December 2014. Yet it seems likely that this unprecedented level of open disagreement between four members of the GGC will leave its mark on the organisation, possibly even leading to shifts in the organisation’s political agenda, and changes in the balance of power in the region.

This chapter tackles the GCC crisis and its causes, symptoms, and the mechanisms used to resolve it, which enabled the ambassadors to return to Doha. The author then examines the likely impact of the dispute, including the emergence of blocs within the GCC, the political maturity shown by all the states, but particularly by Qatar, the ways in which security concerns have unified GCC states, and the crisis of confidence suffered by the GCC countries as a result of the crisis.

The 2014 crisis

Divergence between the GCC states is not a new phenomenon. Differing viewpoints have sometimes led to disagreements between GCC countries, as is true of many other regional organisations. In the past, differences tended to be kept secret because of the nature of political culture in the Gulf region, but disagreements have occasionally been made public. Typically, these related to border disputes, competition between royal families, foreign policies, possible conflicts of interests, and security threats faced by member states. From time to time, differences have also arisen about the nature, role and performance of the GCC. Some of these differences have caused bilateral crises, leading to the withdrawal of one ambassador or another, as was the case when Saudi Arabia recalled its envoy to Qatar in 2002.

However, the 2014 disagreement between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other, was one of the most significant yet. It seriously
threatened the GCC’s activities, adversely affected its functioning and could arguably even have led to its dissolution.

In March 2014, three member states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain) took the unprecedented step of withdrawing their ambassadors from Qatar. (1) This incident was the first of its kind in the GCC’s history, spanning more than three decades. The action was taken in response to a Qatari policy which the other three countries perceived as being incompatible with the security agreement signed by the six member states in January, 2014. Under that agreement, the member states had apparently agreed to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of any other member state, either directly or indirectly, as well as a policy of non-support for any party, organisation or individual seeking to threaten the security and stability of any of the GCC states, whether through direct action, political influence, or by supporting hostile media. (2)

The three countries justified their decision by citing what they claimed was the Qatari government’s failure to comply with what is known as the “first Riyadh Agreement” which had been signed by Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani(3) on 23 November 2013 during a meeting of GCC leaders in Riyadh. (4) A lot of secrecy surrounds this meeting; the details and subjects of the discussions are still not known, and the contents of the agreement have not yet been disclosed. However, there is little doubt that the Riyadh meeting and the agreement concerned the GCC’s reaction to the political instability across the Arab region as a result of the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, which had stirred up muddy waters, and toppled the leaders of four Arab countries, promising shifts towards democracy and pluralism, as well as an end to authoritarianism and one-party rule.

The wave of popular protests spread to many Arab countries, including Bahrain and Oman, which are both GCC member states. In response, some GCC states tried to take action aimed at maintaining the status quo, stopping the waves of protest, and fortifying the GCC countries against their possible spread.

Despite these efforts, support for democratic processes and political Islam grew, particularly for the Muslim Brotherhood, which (thanks to its widespread organisational structures, and its ability to mobilise its members) benefitted from the uprisings, and won elections that followed the overthrow of totalitarian regimes.

Along with the general challenge of change and support for democratisation, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, was seen as undermining the legitimacy and potentially the political stability of some of the GCC states. While some of the GCC
countries embarked on a quest to counteract the revolutions, and to contain the changes they had given birth to, Qatar supported the uprisings, as well as their effects on the region’s politics, economics and press freedom.

Qatar’s support for the uprisings clashed head-on with the policies and efforts of other GCC states. Thus, the Riyadh meeting and first agreement were an attempt by GCC states to discourage Qatar from pursuing its policies on the Arab Spring. When Qatar continued supporting the popular movements and uprisings, the withdrawal of ambassadors represented a kind of political censure, urging Doha to stop acting in ways that conflicted with the interests of other GCC states.

In a statement issued by its foreign ministry, Qatar affirmed that it would not reciprocate by recalling its own ambassadors to the three countries, and stressed its keenness to maintain fraternal relations with the GCC countries. Thus, while continuing to support the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar tried to engage with Saudi Arabia on the issue.

Several meetings were held between the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim, and the Saudi monarch, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. As a result, Saudi Arabia began seeking a solution to the crisis but relations remained strained between Qatar and the UAE. The UAE is publicly hostile towards political Islam, and considers most Islamic movements terrorist in nature. Eventually the dispute between the two countries went public, with social networks becoming virtual battlegrounds as well as platforms for exchanging views.

The ambassadors return

The crisis continued for nearly eight months, which witnessed strife and official boycotts, as well as a great deal of public confusion, all of which seemed to put the GCC at serious risk. There were hints that some countries might withdraw temporarily or leave the GCC altogether. Meanwhile, the leaders of Kuwait worked hard to heal the rift. The situation seemed to remain unchanged until 16 November 2014, when the three countries announced the return of their ambassadors to Doha. In the interim, however, the Riyadh Consultative Summit had taken place, at which the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement was reached. It is worth noting that different parties refer to this variously as the Riyadh Document, the ‘Riyadh Agreement’ and the ‘Riyadh Supplementary Agreement’, with (again) no one disclosing the full contents of the document.
New blocs within the GCC

If we look at the positions of the different parties in the crisis, it becomes clear that when the ambassadors withdrew, the GCC was probably already on the verge of a crisis linked to the emergence of distinct political blocs with conflicting interests. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain were beginning to engage in a political struggle with Qatar, while Oman and Kuwait represent a non-aligned bloc within the GCC. So, for example Saudi Arabia and the UAE support the political regime in Egypt led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Egypt’s military elite, believing that this promotes stability and preserves their interests in the region. Al-Sisi has in return repeatedly praised them for their support.\(^{(7)}\)

In addition, the UAE considers the Muslim Brotherhood issue to be related to its own internal security, especially after the State Security Court in Abu Dhabi handed down tough penalties to members of 'a Muslim Brotherhood cell' for attempting to overthrow the state.\(^{(8)}\)

Nevertheless, the government of Qatar continued to back the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, denouncing what Sheikh Tamim described as a ‘military coup’ that had taken place in Egypt in July 2014.\(^{(9)}\)

Similarly the Yemeni conflict also revealed the conflicting interests of the political blocs within the GCC. While Saudi Arabia considers the Houthis a terrorist group, the Qatari Government sees the group as a legitimate component of Yemen’s political scene.\(^{(10)}\)

New political maturity

It can be said that with the resolution of the GCC crisis, and the return of the ambassadors to Doha, Qatar reached a new level of political maturity. It managed to bring an end to the crisis without changing any of its foreign policy principles or abandoning its allies. This was confirmed by Sheikh Tamim in a television interview broadcast by CNN in September 2014, in which he asserted that Qatar would continue with its policies, and maintain relations with its allies in the region, which many interpreted as a reference to the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^{(11)}\)

Meanwhile, in a speech at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, Qatari foreign minister Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah stated that Qatar had “chosen not to remain on the side-lines of history...deciding to play a significant role in world affairs, communicate with other countries, mediating in conflicts, work to end violent conflicts, and care for refugees”.\(^{(12)}\)
In the same interview, Al-Attiyah affirmed that Qatar’s foreign policy is based on two fundamental principles. The first is independence, and the second is a commitment to supporting the rights of peoples to self-determination, justice and freedom. This explains Qatar’s support for emerging democracies that followed the Arab Spring. Al-Atiyah’s statement (which was made just days after the ambassadorial withdrawal and Qatar’s decision not to withdraw its own ambassadors), indicates that Qatar was able to contain much of the crisis wisely and with political acumen, while remaining firm in its own stance.

**Fears of terrorism**

It is clear that threats to security will continue to be a factor in bringing the GCC countries together around a table and in minimising their differences. The potential dangers represented by both Iran and Iraq that first led to the emergence of the GCC in 1981 are not all that different from the fears of terrorism and the activities of the group known as Daesh.

Undoubtedly, these concerns played a crucial role in reuniting the GCC states, and enabled the ambassadors to return to Doha at the critical moment. Kuwaiti political analyst Ayed al-Manna indicated as much when he said: “We have become greatly obsessed with the issue of variation in foreign policy. Daesh controls one-third of Iraq and a third of Syria...Political differences [with Qatar] are no longer a priority; but emerging problems, especially Daesh which no one had mentioned a few months ago, are. We are in danger from the northeast of Syria to the northwest of Iraq, and this is a real warning for the GCC countries to settle their differences”.(13)

Speaking at the opening of the 35th GCC Summit in Doha, Sheikh Tamim called for the GCC to “face terrorism and extremism”. He said that “the phenomenon of terrorism witnessed by our contemporary world and the Arab region in particular” required taking “all necessary measures to confront and eradicate its roots and address its real political, social and economic causes”. He further called on the GCC states not to be preoccupied by “side issues”, stressing that “regional and international conditions are extremely complicated...and make us assume immense responsibilities,’ and asserting that political differences should not ‘affect the economic, social and media sectors, among others”.

From this it is possible to discern that in the final statement from the summit, fears of terrorism prevailed over internal differences and political visions. The statement affirms the GCC’s united stance against terrorist attacks, and the dangers that these pose to Arab countries as well as to the international community. The GCC leaders also clearly
condemned the crimes of President Bashar al-Assad’s regime against the Syrian people, while confirming the GCC states’ collective support for the “Egyptian road map”, including al-Sisi, the Egyptian government, and the people of Egypt, in their efforts to achieve stability and prosperity. Clearly, this indicates a change in Qatar’s stance towards Egypt based on the security threats in the region. (14)

**A crisis of confidence**

The return of the ambassadors may have ended the initial crisis, but a crisis of confidence among the members, along with their conflicts of interest, is likely to linger for some time to come. While the resolutions of the 35th GCC Summit, indicate a level of convergence and understanding on certain issues, it is important to remember that, while these were significant, they were reached under pressure and to some extent fell below expectations. This might indicate that some of the consequences of the crisis are still playing out.

The GCC countries still hold different positions on a number of matters. There is no common vision on the nature of the threats facing member states or on their sources, let alone on how to deal with or address such threats. There is no unified position on relations with Iran and its nuclear programme, or even on the steep decline in oil prices which could adversely affect most of the GCC countries, with some member states refusing to reduce their levels of production for the sake of restoring some balance to the global oil market.

Undoubtedly some of the smaller GCC states will adopt policies that aim to serve their own interests and secure their place in the regional balance of power. Oman’s hosting of secret negotiations on the nuclear issue between Iran and the West (represented by the P5+1 countries), is just one example of GCC countries adopting unilateral foreign policies to further their own interests in a highly complex region. Qatar has also adopted its own bold unilateral foreign policy, which may intersect negatively with those of the more conservative GCC countries in future.

Nevertheless, several factors also indicate that the crisis of confidence may not last. The mistrust between the governments could decline if the bonds between the GCC countries are consolidated at the levels of the citizens, trade, education and common culture, as well as kinship ties, geographical location and their shared history. One of the main reasons behind the crisis of confidence is the lack of a concrete system within the GCC to clearly regulate and govern relations between member states. For example, it took more than three decades for an agreement on the security of the GCC countries to be signed.
However, neither the terms of that agreement (the first Riyadh Agreement) nor of the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement have been announced; thus their details are known to the leaders of those countries alone.

The absence of mechanisms to resolve disputes between member states in cases of disagreements in perspective could also affect the GCC negatively and obstruct its development and growth. In addition, no institutional activities or structures have yet been created to follow up on the implementation of resolutions taken at the GCC summits. Similarly, apart from the whims of its leaders, no court, structures or policies regulate the activities of the GCC in any way. In addition, no systems, laws, regulations, institutions, policies or joint mechanisms ensure that the GCC’s citizens have a say and that their voices are heard.

**Conclusion**

The challenges faced by GCC countries – fears of terrorism and potential threats from neighbouring countries – succeeded in both creating convergence in the foreign policies of member states and in reuniting them. This convergence may be temporary, however, and its causes may disappear once the current challenges are overcome. Unless a strong and clear system can be introduced to regulate relations between member states, streamline their interests, and connect their foreign policies, the different agendas of the political blocs that have emerged within the GCC are likely to reappear.

The clarity and maturity shown by the GCC states in relation to the 2014 crisis is highly significant. Undoubtedly, this maturity – if it is affirmed by ongoing consolidation at the levels of the citizenry, trade, education, research, culture, kinship ties, geographical proximity and shared history – has the potential to strengthen the concept of integration, and unite the GCC’s interests and their foreign policy positions.

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Impact of Political Sectarianism and Terrorism on Gulf Security

Dr. Ahmed Alazdi*

Abstract

Thanks to their religious and sectarian components, and their economic and geopolitical importance, it can be argued that the Gulf states are at present at the very heart of the global strategic power balance. The stability of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is therefore fundamental to regional stability. However, the political sectarianism and terrorism sweeping through several neighbouring countries pose a grave challenge to the GCC states.

In an effort to understand these challenges, this chapter seeks to deconstruct the concept of political sectarianism, and its impact on the GCC countries. This is followed by an assessment of the nature and scale on which sectarianism is being exploited by foreign parties, and an analysis of just how much of a threat terrorism poses to the stability of GCC states.

The initial premise is that even though the seeds of terrorism and political sectarianism (in all their shapes and forms) are still relatively dormant in the GCC, they have been planted, and are beginning to take hold. Sectarianism and terrorism can be considered two sides of the same coin; one cannot be addressed without the other. They are so
interrelated and intertwined that merely attempting to determine which comes first is almost impossible. If it is accepted that terrorism is contagious, the similarity in their apparent manifestations only adds to the confusion as to which can be seen as spontaneous and which as instigated.

The chapter concludes by arguing that, although sectarianism and terrorism might not pose an immediate danger to the security of the GCC states in the short term, the likelihood of these countries being affected in the longer term depends on how much support sectarian movements can secure in and around the Gulf. The interconnectedness of political Islamist, jihadist and ideological movements in the region is likely to impact on the stability of the GCC states, as will the ability of foreign players to run and manage these forces.

Introduction

The world seems to be witnessing significant strategic shifts, foreshadowing the decline of major forces and the rise of others. Polarisation is increasing and new alliances are forming, and it is possible that competition between opposing forces will intensify and develop into a series of crises and conflicts. The GCC with all its religious and sectarian aspects, as well as its global economic and strategic significance, is right at the centre of all this, and may well form one of the major arenas in which contemporary power struggles will play out.

These strategic shifts create both opportunities and risks. As globalisation takes root ever more deeply, the political sectarianism and terrorism sweeping across neighbouring countries, and forming a ring of fire around the GCC, are among the gravest challenges facing its member states. In my view, the GCC needs to launch a push-back strategy that is strong enough to shatter the sectarian-terrorist complex, or at least keep it at bay long enough to allow the member states to re-group, re-arm and re-strategise, while marshalling all their resources.

To understand the effects of political sectarianism and terrorism on the national security of the GCC states, I first deconstruct the concept of political sectarianism and analyse how it operates in the Gulf. I then assess the scale and nature of its exploitation by external forces. Finally I analyse whether the nightmarish terrorism taking hold in the GCC’s backyard poses a threat to its stability and that of its member states. I conclude that terrorism and political sectarianism are still largely dormant in the GCC, despite occasional attempts to awaken them.
However, the seeds of discontent have been sown, and the GCC countries will need to act quickly to prevent them from finding the fertile ground they need to grow. It must be noted at the outset that sectarianism and terrorism are evil and inseparable twins that must be dealt with together. They share causes and effects so deeply that it is nigh impossible to determine which comes first. They also share so many traits that it is difficult to discern which is spontaneous and which is instigated. Undoubtedly, terrorism is contagious, and can be addressed only by preventative measures.

**Concept and origins of political sectarianism**

Political sectarianism here means the use of religion as a tool for garnering political support. Sectarianism is a form of political bias, but with a religious tinge, that people and groups sometimes use to achieve their own agendas. Even worse, politicians who fail to build civil states often hide their shortcomings by using sectarian or tribal biases.

Christian sectarianism in Europe dates back centuries to the bloody struggles between Protestants and Catholics (this still continues to some degree in Northern Ireland), as well as between the Orthodox Christians and Catholics (this is also still ongoing albeit at a more diplomatic level). Pre-independence India saw a sectarian war between Hindus and Muslims that led to the country splitting into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan in 1947. In modern-day Lebanon, sectarian turmoil has taken many forms, and resulted in a vicious civil war that killed thousands over two decades, only to end up giving way to a constitution and democracy built along political-sectarian lines.(1)

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US and Iran undeniably had a hand in politicising the country’s constitution and Shiite identity. As Palestinian intellectual Azmi Bishara has noted:

"The conversion of social sectarianism into political sectarianism is one of the outcomes of US and Iranian intervention to hollow out the state in Iraq. After the occupation, a regime was installed that was democratic in appearance only, while the country’s demographic was actually being politically rearranged along sectarian lines, and the state dealt with the population on the same basis. Democracy became a tool to sectarianise the state, and an apparatus of oppression, with other sects being marginalized".(2)
Essentially, political sectarianism tears religion away from its original function – which is to instil faith, human values, rationality and common sense – and reduces it to a tool in the hands of people who often have very little theological training.

**Shiite political Islam in the Gulf and the slide towards terrorism**

As intense as the differences among Sunni Muslims in the GCC countries can get, these remain at the level of debate over interpretations of sharia. These differences seldom evolve into a competition between conservatives and reformists for the hearts and minds of the people or for the reins of political power. This does not mean, however, that such differences, although they are contained for now, could not spill over into an all-out, bloody and existential war.

Indeed, war could come sooner rather than later if Iran persists in justifying sectarian mobilisation based on historical injustices and the alleged marginalisation of Shiite minorities, aided by the complete indifference – and/or the tacit blessing – of superpowers such as the United States.

**The complex demographics of the GCC countries**

Before analysing the sectarian Safavid identity that Iran is counting on to spread its so-called Islamic Revolution, proper methodology dictates a recall of some statistics about sectarian and ethnic demographics in the GCC. Using assessments published by the US Central Intelligence Agency and a report by the Arabian Atlas Project, Kazim Shabib notes that:

"Saudi Arabia is ruled and dominated by a Sunni majority. According to the census of September 2004, the Shiite minority comprises less than 10 per cent of the population, with 3 per cent Ismailis.

Bahrain, says the report, has a Shiite majority, but there are also many ethnic and religious minorities, such as 10 per cent Iranians, and 17 per cent non-Iranian Asians (Indians, Baloch, and Pakistanis, among others.)

In Qatar, Iranians (including Baloch) comprise 10 per cent of the population, Pakistanis (including Baloch) make up 18 per cent, Hindus 3 per cent, and Shiites 10 per cent.

Kuwait is ruled by a 45 per cent Sunni majority; there is a 30 per cent Shiite minority, along with 8 per cent Christian Arabs and 5 per cent Iranians.

In the United Arab Emirates, residents of Iranian descent make up 12 per cent of the population, and other Asians 50 per cent; Shiites account for 16 per cent, Sunnis 80 per cent, and other faiths 4 per cent.
Lastly, in the Sultanate of Oman, the official religion is Ibadi Islam, which dates back to the eighth century AD. Ibadis make up 80 per cent of the population, with a presence of all other Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects”.

Despite this sectarian and ethnic mosaic, the Arabian Gulf has remained calm and its citizens have coexisted for centuries, unperturbed by differences between politicians or the danger of invasion. As Ibrahim Al-Askar observed:

Almost certainly the Gulf region has not witnessed any significant sect-driven war since the ninth century AD, when sects began to form, and sect-based fiefdoms began to pop up around the region.

This historical heritage, combined with the astuteness and wisdom of their leaders, and the good business sense of most of its residents (some of the Shiite families are among the wealthiest in the region) has kept sectarianism at bay in the GCC countries. It seems, however, that attempts to tear this harmonious coexistence apart are increasingly common. Globalisation, with the fleetness of its ideas and the vast reach of its communications networks, has also disrupted the tranquility, solidarity, sense of communion and traditional politics that previously prevailed in the region.

The impact of Shiite Iranian expansionism on national security in the GCC states

The mullahs of the Islamic Republic and the officers of its Revolutionary Guards have never forgotten – much less forgiven – the GCC states for mobilising political and ideological support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988. At the end of that war, Iran embarked on its own ideological mobilisation process – strategically using both soft and hard means of settling the score with their sworn Sunni enemies in Iraq and the GCC states.

To that end, Iran rushed to side with the US as soon as the very first US troops touched down in Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran saw an opportunity to use Iraq as their sectarian holy grail, aiming to use that country as a launch pad for Safavid expansion and thus for building a Shiite crescent that would eventually usurp the entire western coast of the Gulf. The fact that the Arab world has been a shambles since 9/11 and the US’s subsequent “constructive chaos” policy only bolstered Iran’s grand plan.

Before this, members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard had held several demonstrations in the holy city of Makkah. One such event, which took place on 31 July 1987, led to the
deaths of 402 pilgrims. In June 1996, Iran was allegedly behind the bombing of a building housing US and allied forces near the city of Dhahran in Saudi Arabia.

Iran is accused of highlighting sectarian differences in and around the GCC states, relentlessly attempting to exacerbate tensions between different communities. In this process, the myriad forms of Islam that had coexisted peacefully for centuries were transformed into resentful, spiteful – and eventually warring – political, social and cultural ghettos. To this end, Iran gave refuge to some of al-Qaeda’s leaders and took groups such as Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Bahrain’s al-Wefaq and the Houthis in Yemen under its wing, effectively placing the GCC countries between the pincers of a sectarian giant.

Many acts of terror against security personnel and civilians in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Region and in Bahrain, as well as military provocations, intelligence activities and online electronic attacks directed at some GCC member states, can be attributed to Iran adopting and fomenting sectarianism. Bahrain has borne the brunt of this process. Before Iran began to fan the tensions, Sunnis and Shiites had lived there peacefully together for hundreds of years. At the time of the Bahraini elections in late 2014, columnist Mohammed Al-Rumaihi summed up the escalating tensions as follows: “Political in essence, the conflict allowed sectarian notions to ride on its back, and these soon boiled over when [GCC member states] realised that calls for sectarian mobilisation and violence had begun to permeate throughout the opposition. The entire scene appeared to be a proxy war that had spilled over national boundaries... [and] which Iran wants to use to plough through the Arab world”.(5)

Hastily adopting a preventative strategy, the GCC sent its Peninsula Shield forces to help the Bahraini security forces to protect civilians and maintain order and security. This was a clear sign that the unity of the GCC remains strong despite internal differences that arise from time to time.

**Ansar Allah in Yemen: another politically driven sect**

Failing to foment sectarian violence in the GCC countries, Iran began targeting countries in the GCC’s backyard. For over half a century, Yemen and Saudi Arabia enjoyed a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship. Then Iranian and US interests converged and started chipping away at this, using Arabism and Ansar Allah as their hammer and chisel. Ansar Allah is the military wing of the Houthi movement, and Saudi Arabia has labelled it a terrorist organisation.
An analysis of the genesis of the Houthi movement in Yemen, as well as its discourses, doctrines and political conduct, reveals that the Jafari Twelver school of Islam strongly influences its leaders. In the early 1990s, Badreddin al-Houthi and his son Hussein left Yemen for the hawza (seminary) of Qom in Iran. They returned with a political, ideological and sectarian political project that was very closely modelled on the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

The earliest manifestations of Houthi sectarianism occurred in 2004 when Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, then leader of the movement, lowered Yemen’s national flag in several locations in the country’s Saada governorate, and raised the Hezbollah flag in its place. Al-Houthi was killed shortly afterwards, and the Houthi movement then spread rapidly throughout Yemen.

Iranian and US support for Houthi expansion threatens the borders of Saudi Arabia, Oman and the other GCC states, especially now that the strategic Strait of Hormuz is in Iranian hands, and the Bab el-Mandeb strait has all but fallen under Houthi control. This means that, in addition to almost controlling the waters of Gulf, Iran effectively controls the Red Sea.

The US and the Shiite minority trump card
Iran’s apparent support for Shiite expansionism in and around the Gulf may well be understandable, but the role played by the US in fanning of the flames of this sectarian tension is perplexing. Nevertheless, the fomenting of political sectarianism has been inextricably intertwined with colonial invasion and oppression, and this is especially true of the Arab colonies. The US seems to be attempting to repeat history by fomenting sectarianism in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan, and by not only staying quiet about, but by practically supporting the Houthi takeover of Yemen.

In addition, US officials have displayed an unusual interest in Bahrain’s al-Wefaq Party. In an article entitled “Has Bahrain’s al-Wefaq become America’s foot in the door?” columnist Sawsan Al-Shaer observed:

"Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski began his visit to Bahrain by heading to Al-Wefaq, even before he even met with the crown prince which caused Bahrain to take the unprecedented decision to have him leave the country“.

Earlier in her article, Al-Shaer noted that “US decision-makers never ceased to have an interest in the Bahraini opposition“ and quoted Simon Henderson, director of the Gulf
and Energy Policy Program at the Washington Institute, as saying “Bahrain’s ban on mainstream opposition poses a dilemma for American foreign policy”.(6)

The Salafist shift: from placidity to the quicksand of politics and the trumpet of jihad

Salafism has its own intrinsically peaceful knowledge and governance system. However, with the violent and arduous conflict in Afghanistan, the so-called Sahwa (Islamist awakening), the repercussions of 9/11, and the “Arab Spring”, several strands of Salafism have emerged, the most important of which are political Salafism and Salafist jihadism; either of these could potentially disrupt national security in the GCC.

Saudi Arabia: between national Salafism and international pragmatism

Since the religio-political alliance between Imam Prince Muhammad bin Saud and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab (1723-1791), Salafism has been strong in Saudi Arabia, particularly among the ruling elite. The term Salafism means returning to the true meanings and purposes of the faith as practiced by the Salaf (the early Muslim companions of the Prophet Muhammad). By its nature, Salafism never strays from the original premises of Islam, which are to build up a moral and ethical value system, and to filter out heretical innovation and superstition (this includes refraining from openly criticising political or religious leaders).

According to French academic and political scientist, Stéphane Lacroix, most Salafists are “pacifists who reject violence, have little interest in politics’, and focus on living by Sharia, the singularity of God and their understanding of the faith”.(7)

This religio-political contract is still active in contemporary Saudi Arabia: the state, represented by the ruling clan, handles politics, while the official religious establishment handles religious and moral matters. The state, helped along by the religious establishment, has been successful at quashing attempts to change the status quo, such as the siege on the Holy Mosque in Mecca from 20 November to 4 December 1979 and Juhayman al-Otaybi’s ill-fated attempt at a coup, or the ensuing Sahwa movement, which led to what Lacroix has called ‘a failed insurrection’ in the late 1980s.(8)

King Faisal (who reigned from 1964 to 1975) established the Islamic Solidarity Project, in which dawa (converting others to Islam) played a significant role in establishing a resilient and effective force in the fight against nationalistic and leftist tendencies in the
Arab world (especially when it came to Nasserite nationalism). In a speech honouring leaders of the Hajj in 1966, King Faisal made the following call for Islamic solidarity:

“If this call, my brethren, offends or upsets some, such as colonialists, communists and Zionists, I am most assured that Muslims shall not be diverted, thwarted or refrain from supporting the righteous, their faith, and their word, and shall co-operate for the good and for the fear of God”. (9)

Indeed, Islamic dawa has had considerable success in keeping notions of nationalism, leftism and communism out of the GCC. However, the events of 9/11 (notwithstanding the ambiguity surrounding who was behind the attacks), provided the perfect pretext for political and media campaigns that weakened the compass of Saudi ideology and foreign policy, which, in turn, became utterly pragmatic.

Salafist jihadism as a response to the US war on terror
Many factors led to the gestation and birth of jihadist movements, with social frustration and the lack of response to moderate religious leadership being two of the main ones. However, the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the US occupation of Iraq from 2003 onwards, and the sectarian politics of paramilitary militias in Iraq are the more immediate causes.

Palestinian political analyst, Azmi Bishara has described the reciprocal causality between sectarianism and jihadism as follows:

“The emergence of the Islamic State is the result of the explosive mix between Salafist jihadism and sectarianism, especially in light of the decline and eventual diminishment of the national state. Salafist jihadism does not acknowledge other sects, not to mention politics or a social contract, or even different levels of piety”. (10)

If Iran continues to foment sectarianism and provoke jihadist cells, both dormant and active, Bishara’s words may well become applicable to the GCC countries.

Political Islam and the security of the GCC
During the second Gulf War from August 1990 to February 1991, tensions grew between the Saudi government and the Muslim Brotherhood when some members of the Brotherhood supported Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. Saudi Arabia backed its fellow GCC state in that war, and expected the Brotherhood to do the same, having given them shelter and support after their exile or expulsion from their own countries.
The tensions forced some of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders to leave Saudi Arabia for greener pastures, such as Qatar where the ascension of Prince Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to the helm in 1995 was to the benefit of political Islam.

The Muslim Brotherhood landed with a thud in Qatar’s media and political circles, which had been trying to “realign” political Islam. **Researcher Jamal Abdullah, who specialises in Qatari foreign policy, analysed the situation as follows:**

“Qatar decided to support the march of these [Arab] nations towards freedom. That course of action fundamentally changed the country’s global image: Qatar transformed from a reconciliatory mediator to an active supporter – which eventually forced it to participate in military action under the umbrella of an international coalition, like it did in the NATO campaign against Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi in April 2011”.(11)

The other GCC member states felt that Qatar’s support for political Islam deviated from the concept of joint political security, and this caused a temporary crisis in inter-GCC relationships.

With the exception of Qatar, the political and media discourse of GCC member states tends to justify hostility towards political Islam, and sees it as posing a challenge to their stability and peaceful co-existence. However, many individuals and groups within these states find the ideas that the Islamists propagate rather attractive, thus potentially undermining the religious establishments that some GCC leaders draw upon to legitimise their political power.

Some GCC regimes see the Muslim Brotherhood as having so much power, such a different political agenda, and so much traction when it comes to making new alliances that it would be very difficult for the GCC countries to partner with them in managing regional issues using the traditional methodologies and approaches that they are used to. This is especially true when it comes to protecting the GCC against various existing and probable threats, such as the dominance of Iran, and possible popular protests. Essentially, they fear that the Brotherhood might be more of an instigating than a tempering factor.

However, Qatar and the rest of the GCC member states eventually overcame their differences and managed to find common ground. This evidence of the strength of their alliance should certainly help to insulate them from ethnic and sectarian unrest that might have affected them badly.
The GCC and the spill over of terrorism from neighbours

After the 9/11 attacks, terrorists brutally struck Saudi Arabia in retaliation for joining the coalition against terror, riding on the wave of “euphoria” they expressed after what they saw as the success of the first ghazwa (battle) against America. Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states have since successfully stamped out various terrorist activities in their territories. Enhanced security and financial measures, as well as intelligence strategies helped them thwart several planned attacks before they were carried out.

Despite their success in containing and deterring domestic terrorism, fears remain that the ideas and actions of terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq and Yemen might spill over into the GCC countries. This is of particular concern given the considerable number of GCC nationals who have already joined these groups, including among the higher ranks of command and control. These fears were exacerbated when the IS published a map of its so-called territory that showed Kuwait to be part of their state. The Houthis’ claim that Mecca is within their northern border did not help matters.

In an attempt to prevent the spread of terrorist-aligned groups in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi interior ministry announced on 7 March 2014 that they consider al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaeda in Yemen, the Islamic State, the al-Nusra Front, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Houthis to be terrorist groups. This makes it illegal for any Saudi citizen to join, support or sympathise with any of these groups. Saudi Arabia didn’t stop there.

In September 2014, the kingdom hosted a conference for an international coalition against the Islamic State, in which ten GCC and Arab states and the US participated. Since that conference, a number of GCC states have sent fighter jets and pilots to participate in sorties with the US-led forces against Islamic State bases in Iraq and Syria.

History has taught that ideas can be beaten only with ideas, and that security or military responses can go only so far in putting a stop to terrorism; they can never root it out. Herein lies the importance of developing comprehensive intellectual and cultural responses that rely on invigorating horizontal and vertical intellectual dialogue at all levels – among the elite, in the media, and among ordinary citizens in the GCC countries. Only with intellectual consistency and a clear vision of the benefits of unity will the social fabric of the GCC become immune to extremism. So far, with the exception of Doha’s efforts to get various individuals and movements to engage in cultural and social dialogue via various media channels, discussions about terrorism remain largely an
activity for the political elite, yet violence is a socio-political phenomenon and engaging the general population in dialogue about violence is crucial.

**Conclusion**

While sectarianism and terrorism might not seem to pose any immediate danger to the security of the GCC, the chances of them gaining ground in future depends on the depth of foreign support for sectarian movements in and around the Arabian Gulf. Levels of interconnectivity between political Islamist, jihadist and ideological movements in the region will also play a role, as will the ability of these players to run and manage their forces in ways that could impact on the stability of the GCC states. The sheer fragility of the situation compels us to hope that the GCC will remain an oasis of stability in the midst of a turbulent desert. **This requires the GCC countries to cooperate in:**

- Building a nation-state; that is, bolstering an all-encompassing national and GCC identity by making all citizens truly equal in terms of their rights and duties, rewarding individuals based on loyalty and merit rather than sect, tribe or creed, and building a network of social relations based on the values of peace, tolerance and acceptance.

- Expediting the unification and integration of the GCC politically, socially and in terms of security, and establishing the hoped-for union. Such a union could be the shield that protects the GCC from sectarianism, eradicates terrorism and thwarts foreign enemies. In parallel, political reforms must be prioritised to ensure political consensus among the member states, and to address the ongoing political, social and sectarian polarisation.

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Water Security in the Gulf Region

Dr. Taha Al-Farra**

Abstract

The difficulties facing member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in securing sustainable water supplies seem to be increasing and becoming chronic. The fact that natural water resources are rare in this region, combined with minimal precipitation and high evaporation rates, are just some of the reasons why the region’s water resources are dwindling at alarming rates.

The problem is compounded by the scarcity of renewable water resources and the limited availability of arable land. The dependency of the GCC states on desalination has severely strained their national budgets and caused irreparable damage to their ecosystems.

This chapter analyses the status of water security within the GCC as of 2015. It describes the state of water resources in the member states, outlines their respective national water policies, and considers possible future threats to their water security in the foreseeable future.

Based on this analysis, the author recommends that GCC countries waste no time in obtaining a better understanding of the dangers threatening their water supplies, and an
appreciation of the grave consequences of water insecurity for their political and social stability. The GCC states must, therefore, develop an early warning system, and improve their readiness to monitor this system.

Introduction

Lengthy periods of drought, combined with naturally low rates of precipitation, have become major contributory factors in to the serious problems which GCC countries face in securing their water supplies.

The natural features and climates of the six member states are very similar. With the exception of a few parts of Saudi Arabia and Oman, all the states have extremely arid climates with negligible precipitation. Natural water sources are scarce and arable land is extremely limited.

Human factors, such as high population growth, rapid urbanisation, and gigantic industrial and agricultural projects exacerbate the pressure on already strained water-supply systems. The GCC states have had little choice but to secure alternative water supplies. The most important of these are desalination plants, which, as of 2014, accounted for some seventy per cent of the world’s desalinated water output. The member states have also resorted to recycling waste water from sewage systems, and from industrial and agricultural operations. However, their dependence on desalination has placed a severe strain on the national budgets of the GCC states, and caused irreparable damage to local and regional ecosystems.

Understanding water security

In 2000, the second World Water Forum, held in the Netherlands under the banner of ‘Water Security in the 21st Century’, defined water security as:

"Water security, at any level from the household to the global, means that every person has access to enough safe water at affordable cost to lead a clean, healthy and productive life, while ensuring that the natural environment is protected and enhanced". (1)

Similarly, the Global Water Partnership has defined a water-secure world as vital for "a future in which there is enough water for social and economic development and for ecosystems. A water-secure world integrates a concern for the intrinsic value of water together with its full range of uses for human survival and well-being. A water-secure world harnesses water’s productive power and minimizes its destructive force. It is a world where every person has enough safe, affordable water to lead a clean, healthy
and productive life. It is a world where communities are protected from floods, droughts, landslides, erosion and water-borne diseases”.

Various experts suggest that the concept of water security must be measured in relation to a water balance. This refers to the balance between the aggregate water supply (from conventional and non-conventional water sources) over a period of time, and the aggregate water demand for various purposes over the same period. In other words, it is necessary to establish both the input and output quantities of water within a system. With this information, it is possible to determine which of the following possibilities apply:

- A water balance: in which demand equals available supply.
- A water surplus: in which water resources are more than ample.
- A water deficit: in which water resources are less than required.

Finite water resources
Using a quantitative scale, analysts apply the concept of finite water resources to either of two situations. The first is water poverty, where less than 1000m3 of water is available per person per year. The second is a water deficit, which describes a sudden case of demand for water outstripping the available and renewable supplies in an otherwise balanced system, leading to an apparent water deficit, sometimes called a water gap.

Water supplies in the GCC countries
Water in the Arabian Gulf is obtained from three main sources:
- Groundwater, including water in surface wells (which are usually replenished by seasonal rains) and deep wells (which are refilled via ancient geological formations).
- Desalinated seawater, which is supplied via modern, high-tech desalination stations.
- Recycled water, which has been introduced relatively recently and is obtained via wastewater and sewage treatment plants that supply water for agricultural purposes only.

In relation to these water resources, we need to consider the demand for water in the GCC countries and the productive efficiency of their existing water resources.
UNDP’s Arab Human Development Report 2009 indicates that water scarcity is one of the gravest threats to the environment and therefore to human security both in the Arab world generally and to the GCC member states in particular. (7)

If we apply the quantitative scale to the Arab world, at least thirteen Arab countries fall into the water-poor category. (8) Renewable freshwater resources now stand at less than 500m3 per person per year in all six GCC states, while Kuwait is almost completely dependent on non-conventional water resources, such as desalination. (9)

Based on this information, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands have predicted severe water deficits in all six GCC countries by 2030, further forecasting that all the Arab Gulf nations will be classified as water-poor.

To assess the current water situation in GCC countries, this list provides the primary resources of water and basic water demand level, and outlines how available water resources are managed:

**Primary water resources**

Surface water resources include rainwater and seasonal estuaries. Rainfall rates range from 1mm to 100mm per year. Rain is the main source of replenishment for many of the region’s groundwater basins but about 85 per cent of these basins are in extremely arid areas, and their water is too brackish for agricultural use.

Networks of seasonal estuaries exist across the GCC, with flow rates that vary according to topography, soil, prevailing environmental conditions, and annual rainfall. These estuaries usually flow for limited periods during the year, ranging from a few hours to days or even months. In some very dry areas, they flow only every few years.

**Groundwater resources**

The quality of groundwater differs from one basin to another. Most sources of groundwater are concentrated in central Saudi Arabia, and are very ancient. Information about the condition of these resources is incomplete. Programs to preserve these basins and ensure that they are replenished with rainwater need to be devised, so they can be tapped when needed. This will require precise record-keeping, follow-up and evaluations. Some of the region’s best-known groundwater basins are the one in the Eastern Region,
the Al-Hammad basin, the Riyadh basin, and the Empty Quarter basin, all of which are in (or partially in) Saudi Arabia.

Data collected by the UN Food Programme indicates that groundwater is the primary source of fresh water in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, while surface water is the prevailing source of fresh water in Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

**Unconventional water resources**

In their quest to find new resources of water, the GCC states are now among the most prolific producers of non-conventionally-produced water, through the desalination of seawater, and the recycling and reuse of sewage and industrial waste water. Although these processes are hugely expensive when compared to conventional water resources, they are bound to be of great significance in future, as demand for potable water rises and other water resources grow increasingly scarce.(10)

**Renewable water resources**

Unfortunately, groundwater is currently being used at a rate that far outstrips the pace at which it is able to replenish itself. For example, Saudi Arabia draws 14.430 million cubic metres of groundwater a year, which is roughly 3.5 times the replenishment rate of its renewable groundwater resources. The other GCC member states have reached a similar draw ratio of about 3:1, except for the UAE where that ratio is significantly higher.(11)

This is why desalination has a major role to play in increasing the supply of potable water and satisfying the demand for water in various sectors, with the six GCC states currently collectively responsible for some 60% of the global production of desalinated water.(12)

**Rising demand for water**

Demand for water in the GCC states has risen by a massive 140 per cent since the mid-2000s. Kuwait tops the list with its increased demand for municipal water. Significant change in the distribution of water allocations in the six member states is unlikely in the near future, but the aggregate allocation for the agricultural sector in the GCC countries is expected to drop from an average of 63 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent by 2025.(13)
Meanwhile, the combined population of all six states has quintupled over the past few decades, increasing from around eight million people in the 1970s to some 43.5 million in 2010, meaning that the population growth rate is among the highest in the world.\(^{(14)}\)

Since the 1980s, accelerating development and population growth have led to the demand for water increasing dramatically from six billion m\(^3\) in 1980 to more than 32 billion m\(^3\) in 2005.\(^{(15)}\)

Sharp increases in population and the ensuing rise in demand for food led most GCC countries to devise ambitious agricultural policies which aim to sustain social and economic development and achieve food self-sufficiency. As a result, the agricultural sector has become the region’s largest consumer of water, accounting for more than 85 per cent of gross water usage in these countries.\(^{(16)}\)

It is clear that three interconnected, intersecting factors are responsible for the increase in demand for water in the GCC: population growth, the rising demand for water resulting from developmental requirements, and excessive water consumption associated with consumption patterns in these countries.

**National water security policies in GCC countries (water resource management)**

A water policy is the framework by which available water resources are managed, and the set of rules and regulations governing water management internally and externally. National water security policies means water policies adopted at a national level by each state within the GCC. From the perspective of integrated water-resources management (IWRM), most reports concerning global water issues agree that three kinds of problems need to be addressed, namely:

- Problems caused by extreme waste of water resources.
- Problems that are well known and for which no economically efficient solutions are available at this time.
- Problems resulting from excessive demand for water, which are now being studied and analysed through governmental policymaking and investment strategies.\(^{(17)}\)

A study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development indicated that the two main factors preventing better water governance in the OECD countries are the multiplicity of government institutions responsible for water resources, and generally
poor governance at all levels. (18) Improving water governance at all levels is key to the sustainable management of water resources, and essential for achieving water security.

National water security policies – those already adopted and those that might be adopted in future – can be divided into supply-based and demand-based policies. In terms of demand-based policies, researchers have been working hard to determine the optimal instruments and mechanisms for water-demand management. These include analysing modern irrigation techniques, the privatisation of the water industry, government subsidisation of water in urban areas, and water quota systems.

Comprehensive reviews of the distribution of water to various sectors, and public water-awareness campaigns derived from the World Bank’s so-called ‘new thinking on water management’ are beginning to replace the more traditional supply-side management approach with a strategy focusing instead on management of demand. (19) Measures to manage demand include:

- Using modern irrigation technologies and saline water for irrigation where possible.
- Developing strains of crops that require less water, and modifying crop mixes.
- Redistributing water supplies among other sectors.
- Rationalising water consumption and promoting water awareness.

The major water issues and challenges facing the GCC countries
The Arab world is a generally arid region, and this is unlikely to change anytime soon. In 1950, renewable water resources in the Arab world amounted to more than 4,000m3 per capita per year. By 1995, this figure had declined to 1,312m3 and reached 1,233m3 by 1998. By 2025, this figure is expected to drop to as low as 547m3. (20)

It is worth noting that since the early 1990s, water consumption globally has been rising at more than double the rate of population growth. A study by the UK-based risk-assessment firm Maplecroft found that fourteen of the eighteen countries designated as having extremely stressed water resources are in the Middle East and North Africa. According to that study, the countries are listed in the following order with 1 being the most stressed:

1. Mauritania;
2. Kuwait
3. Jordan
4. Egypt
5. Israel
7. Iraq

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8. Oman
9. UAE
10. Syria
11. Saudi Arabia
14. Libya
16. Djibouti
17. Tunisia
18. Algeria

In addition, the Maplecroft report placed Iran and Qatar’s water situation in the ‘highly stressed’ category. As such, all six GCC member states except Bahrain suffer from severe or high water stress. Clearly, it is impractical for the region to depend on its own natural water resources, as these are inherently just too scarce.

Furthermore, since the groundwater resources of most GCC countries are drawn from basins that cross national boundaries, numerous issues and challenges arise in the management of water, with some of the most important of these including:

- The freshwater per capita index of these countries already stands at less than 500m³ per year (the severe stress threshold).
- The rates of water demand in the municipal sector are far higher than these countries are capable of supplying via their desalination and recycling projects, which already place a considerable strain on their national budgets.
- Reserves in the groundwater reservoirs are dropping and the quality of groundwater, is declining due to its unregulated usage.
- The gap between the requirements of the agricultural sector and available resources is growing constantly: at 85 percent of aggregate consumption, the agricultural sector is the region’s single biggest water consumer.
- Poorly designed water subsidies to urban households caused an increase in the demand for water, placing a huge financial burden on national budgets with virtually no cost recovery.
- According to international reports, water resources have been adversely affected by climate change in the Arab world in general and in the Arabian Peninsula in particular.
One of the most important reports on this is by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the UNDP and the UNEP.\(^{(26)}\)

### The future water security of the GCC states

Recent studies predict that global demand for water is going to be around 40 per cent higher in 2030 than it is today, with population growth usually being the biggest cause of increased demand. The world’s population already exceeds seven billion. If the growth rate continues at the current level, approximately 60 per cent of the world’s population will suffer severe water shortages by 2025.\(^{(27)}\) The situation is only going to get worse as shown in Table 1:

#### Table 1: The availability of water in world’s driest places in 2035

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2010 population (million)</th>
<th>Projected 2035 population (million)</th>
<th>Per capita water supply (m(^3)/person/year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>7.512</td>
<td>11.042</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>1.759</td>
<td>2.451</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>27.448</td>
<td>40.444</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>1.262</td>
<td>1.711</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>24.053</td>
<td>46.196</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>2.737</td>
<td>4.328</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Four of the GCC’s six member states – including Qatar – are among the world’s top ten countries in terms of vulnerability to severe water scarcity. Kuwait (at only 10m\(^3\) per capita per year) tops the list; the UAE (at 58m\(^3\) per capita per year) is third; Qatar (at 94m\(^3\) per capita per year) is fifth, and Saudi Arabia (at 118m\(^3\) per capita per year) is eighth. In addition, Qatar and Bahrain are reportedly already consuming 2.8 and 1.5 times than their available water resources respectively.\(^{(28)}\)

### Strategies for managing and protecting water security in the GCC

Several imaginative strategies have been proposed to address the aforementioned challenges, including:

- Importing water via pipelines: one example of this was the ‘Peace Pipe’ project, which was on the agenda when the Middle East peace talks began in Madrid in 1991, although many economic and political issues prevented it from seeing the light of day.

- Using modern cloud seeding and rainmaking techniques.
• Moving icebergs to water-poor areas: this is a technically intricate, complex and costly process that is fraught with practical, political and environmental problems.

**The World Bank have developed a number of more reality-based development strategies including:**

- Agricultural investment in water-rich countries such as Sudan, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Uganda and Turkey. Some GCC countries are already making such investments.

- Investing in agricultural projects in partnership with Turkey on Arab lands that are irrigated by Turkish water, with a framework for revenue sharing.

- Expediting a comprehensive strategy for the development of water resource management policies in all the GCC countries.

- Expediting water interconnectivity projects between the GCC countries, along the lines of existing projects linked to electricity.

- Investment in scientific research to improve desalination technologies.

**Conclusion**

Potable water is becoming an increasingly rare commodity, and factors such as runaway population growth, poor management and climate change are making water management and allocation exceptionally complex. Desalinated water is invaluable in fulfilling the demands of the GCC member states and their economies. However, any disruptions of water supply would have dire consequences for the political and social stability in the affected countries. A better understanding of the dangers threatening water supplies is crucial, and the capacity of the relevant government institutions to issue early warnings should be publicly accessible. At the same time, preventative and mitigating procedures must be put in place to ensure water security for all, and plans to counter threats to water security should be expedited.

*Dr. Taha Al-Farra* is a professor at Naif Arab University for Security Sciences.

**References**

4. This assessment forms part of a continuum whereby areas are considered: water-rich if individuals have access to more than 2,000m3 of potable water per year; water-stressed where individuals have access to 1,000-1,700m3 of water per year; water-poor where individuals have access to less than 1,000m3 of water per year; and extremely water-poor: where individuals have access to less than 500m3 of water per year. For more details, see: Gleick, Peter H (2002). The World’s Water, 2002–2003: The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources. Washington, DC: Island Press.


10. See https://www.gulfpolicies.com/index.php

11. Ibid.


17. IPS News Agency (2010), UAE–GCC Summit: Abu Dhabi Water Declaration Calls for Adoption of Modern Farming Technologies, Emirates News Agency, 8 December


http://www.worldwaterforum5.org


26. The IPCC issues regular reports that are available at www.ipcc.ch .
Energy Alternatives and the Future of Oil and Gas in the Gulf

Dr. Jassim Hussain*

Abstract

Contemporary regional and global energy developments, especially regarding oil and natural gas, make it imperative for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to consider developing alternative energy sources, such as nuclear, solar and wind power, for their own electricity consumption. This would allow them to export more of their oil and gas resources, thus boosting state revenues.

This chapter focuses on the importance of evaluating different energy sources in relation to optimising their usage. This is particularly relevant given increasing demands for electricity from local domestic and industrial users in the GCC countries. The GCC states have large reserves not only of crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), but could also harness nuclear energy, as well as solar and wind power. The chapter concludes that the most important alternative power source for the GCC countries will be nuclear power. To this end, the building of nuclear power plants will be as essential as emphasising the peaceful use of this vital resource. The building of new plants will need to be achieved through contracting specialist companies and involving the relevant international bodies to ensure the safety of installations.
Introduction

The GCC states’ need to harness alternative energy sources is not caused by a shortage of oil or gas. However, excessive reliance on these traditional but finite fossil fuels is seen as unwise, especially since alternative energy sources are within reach. In addition to hydroelectricity and nuclear power, renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power are beginning to seem increasingly feasible. While reservations about nuclear energy are common, given the sensitivities around the toxicity of nuclear waste and the manufacture of nuclear weapons, renewable energy sources such as solar and wind are freely available; and, unlike fossil fuels, the sun and wind are not facing imminent depletion.

If the GCC countries were to use alternative energies to meet their own electricity generation requirements, they would be able to export more of their gas and oil reserves, thus increasing state revenues. Using alternative energy sources to meet the increasing demand for electricity from domestic and industrial users also makes sense in terms of optimising energy usage.

Of course, the relative costs of oil and gas versus solar, wind and other technologies must be assessed. Historically, finding alternatives to oil seems to become a global priority whenever the price of black gold rises and remains high for significant periods of time. This chapter was written in the last quarter of 2014 when oil prices suddenly declined dramatically. Notwithstanding the massive drop in oil prices, the average price of oil remained above US$100 a barrel from 2011 to mid-2014, and may well rise to these levels again in the not too distant future.

The relative importance of different energy sources

The energy mix worldwide, and the relative importance of different energy resources, can be classified as follows: oil, coal, gas, hydropower, nuclear power, and renewable energy (see Table 1). The oil sector is undoubtedly essential, but this does not detract from the relative importance of coal or the potential growth of renewable energy sources. In addition to oil and gas, the GCC countries enjoy environmentally friendly energy resources, and have the potential to remain leaders in the provision of energy from various sources.
Oil

The oil sector, which includes both oil and gas, is the world’s primary energy resource source, providing about 56 per cent of the world’s energy at the beginning of 2014. More specifically, oil alone supplies about a third of the world’s energy needs, reflecting its great importance. The high demand for oil is primarily the result of our dependence on fuel-driven transportation and electricity in every area of our lives. In addition, oil and gas are essential raw materials used in the production of a vast range of commodities, from fertilisers to beauty products and building materials.

Oil reserves are still being discovered in different parts of the world. According to the Energy Report prepared by British Petroleum (BP), the available discovered global oil reserves are sufficient to last for around another fifty years. This estimate is based on current production and consumption levels (88 million barrels per day, or 31 billion barrels a year, compared with 1,688 billion barrels of oil reserve volumes). At current production and consumption levels, oil reserves in the Middle East – including the GCC countries – are sufficient to last for about 82 years, which is far higher than the average, although the average rises to nearly 120 years in other regions, such as South America, particularly Venezuela.

New oil discoveries, particularly in South America, have increased the size of the world’s reserves from 1,041 billion barrels in 1993 to 1,334 billion barrels in 2003, and to 1,688 billion barrels in 2013. In fact, around 17.7 per cent and 15.8 per cent of global oil reserves are in Venezuela and Saudi Arabia respectively. However, due to different production capacities, the amount of oil produced by these two countries differs significantly. In 2013, for example, Saudi Arabia contributed about 13 per cent to global oil production while Venezuela contributed 3.3 per cent (see Table 2).
Table 2: Global reserves of oil and gas in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oil and gas-producing countries and regions</th>
<th>Percentage of discovered crude oil</th>
<th>Percentage of world oil production</th>
<th>Percentage of discovered natural gas</th>
<th>Percentage of world gas production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>17.7</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
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<td>Libya</td>
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<td>–</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Angola</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>–</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td><strong>OPEC countries</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Former Soviet Union</strong></td>
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<td>28.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>European Union</strong></td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The only GCC country not listed here is Bahrain, which has no crude oil reserves and 0.1 per cent of global gas reserves.

Coal

Coal is currently the world’s second largest resource used for power generation. Evidence is that coal produced nearly 30 per cent of total global energy consumed in 2013. This proportion may increase in the future in light of the adoption of so-called ‘clean coal’ technologies. Of course, the cost advantages of the coal acquisition factor...
compared to some other sources cannot be denied, with this factor partly explains the continuing prevalence of coal use despite its inability to surpass oil consumption. It is true that coal reserves declined from 1,039,181 million tons in 1993 to 984,453 million tons in 2003, falling again to 891,531 million tons in 2013. However, the quantity of discovered coal is sufficient to ensure that, based on current production and consumption levels, there is enough to last for another 113 years.

Not surprisingly, China has the lion’s share of the world’s coal at 47 per cent. China’s reserves and production capacity are high, but so is the environmental impact of its coal production. Visitors to Beijing invariably notice high levels of smog, reflecting China’s relatively lax environmental policies. This situation is unlikely to last, and the Chinese authorities are already starting to introduce stricter controls. This might have implications for the future use of coal as an energy source in China.

By contrast, Germany has about 4.5 per cent of the world’s coal reserves, but its share of global coal production is about 1 per cent. This reflects Germany’s decision to cut back on the use of coal in line with environmental legislation introduced in the European Union. None of the GCC countries have significant coal reserves or production (see Table 3).

Table 3: Coal reserves and coal production in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of discovered coal</th>
<th>Percentage of coal production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Ukraine</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Soviet Union</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Gas

Gas comes third after oil and coal, in terms of global energy consumption. There is near-universal consensus that gas will be an essential energy source in the future. Huge discoveries of natural gas in South and North America, as well as China, combined with the growing phenomenon of shale gas in the US, are contributing to the uptake of gas for industrial use and electricity generation, to give just two examples.

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Interestingly, reserves of discovered natural gas increased from 118 trillion cubic meters in 1993 to 157 trillion cubic meters in 2003, and to 187 trillion cubic meters in 2013. Discoveries are ongoing in many parts of the world, especially in Iran and Russia (see Table 2). Based on current production and consumption levels, the world has sufficient gas to last for another 54 years. However, natural gas reserves in the Middle East, especially Qatar, could last for 130 years, which is at present the highest projected duration period for their availability globally.

The top three countries in the world in terms of gas reserves are Iran, Russia and Qatar, but this might change given the ongoing shale gas discoveries. Unlike Qatar, Iran and Russia are generally considered unfriendly by many Western states. The West has also had several bad experiences with Russia over the issue of its gas supplies to Europe, especially during the winter periods when the demand for gas increases.

**Hydroelectric power**

Hydroelectric power contributes about 6.7 per cent to the global energy mix. Generally considered a renewable energy source, hydroelectric power is vulnerable to drought, and is not a viable option for the GCC countries.

**Nuclear energy**

In 2013, energy from nuclear power stations comprised about 4.4 per cent of global consumption. This was the lowest rate since 1984 due to Japan and other countries cutting back on nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima disaster. As shown by the West’s stance on Iran’s nuclear programme, many people fear that the spread of nuclear technology could mean that it ends up being used for military purposes.

At the level of GCC countries, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has taken steps to secure nuclear energy, signing an agreement with South Korea and the relevant international supervisory bodies for the establishment of nuclear power plants. Given the country’s significant economic growth, and its efforts to strengthen its position in the global economy, the UAE’s leaders have realised that nuclear energy will be necessary to meet the growing domestic demand for electricity.

**Renewable energy**

Meeting increasing electricity demand in the GCC will mean doubling the electricity supply every decade, which, while expensive, is essential to sustain economic growth.
Most of the GCC states aim to increasingly generate electricity from renewable sources so that they can export more of their crude oil and gas, thereby enhancing state revenues.

In addition, the GCC states are among the world’s fourteen worst countries in terms of carbon-dioxide emissions resulting from the consumption of fossil fuels, namely oil and gas.\(^{(1)}\) Renewable energy sources have the potential to help the GCC states to both reduce emissions and contribute to protecting the environment. Also, renewable energy production costs are widely expected to decline in the coming years as the related technologies develop and economies of scale increase.

It is reassuring to know that the GCC countries have set some goals in relation to developing renewable energy sources by 2020. For example, Abu Dhabi, the capital of and second largest city in the UAE, aims to produce 24 per cent of its electricity via renewable sources by 2020, including from solar, wind and waste power. As of late 2014, 97 per cent of the UAE’s electricity was derived from gas.\(^{(2)}\) Thus, the goals that have been set do seem reasonably realistic.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is promoting the use of renewable energy. The city already hosts the headquarters of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and has begun work on building Masdar City – a specialised settlement close to Abu Dhabi that aims to house around 45,000 people. The city aims to rely entirely on renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, to meet its energy needs, and motor vehicles will not be allowed.\(^{(3)}\) The city is being built by Masdar, a subsidiary of the immensely prosperous Mubadala Development Company.\(^{(4)}\)

Similarly, the Emirate of Dubai, also in the UAE, plans to diversify its energy sources by 2030 in order to reduce its reliance on gas to just over 70 per cent of total consumption (see Table 4).

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Energy source} & \text{Percentage of energy supply} \\
\hline
\text{Gas} & 71 \\
\text{Nuclear} & 12 \\
\text{Clean coal} & 12 \\
\text{Solar} & 5 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

\textit{Source: Dubai Electricity and Water Authority quoted in Al-Qallab (2014).}
For its part, Qatar seeks to derive 16 per cent of its electricity from solar energy by 2018. This is considered the GCC countries’ most ambitious solar project so far.(5)

Affirming official interest in renewable energy, the GCC has hosted major international conferences on renewable energy. For example, the World Future Energy Summit 2013 was held in the UAE, after the country won the bid to host the IRENA headquarters in Abu Dhabi, while Greentech Media’s annual Solar Summit was held in Qatar in November 2014.

Analysts from organisations such as IRENA have explained that the GCC countries’ relatively tardy adoption of renewable energies (when compared with countries in Asia, Europe and North America) was linked to the state subsidies provided for the use of fossil fuels. In this regard, it is highly likely that Oman, Bahrain and perhaps Kuwait will again resort to subsidies in response to the sudden fall in oil prices.

In terms of energy consumption, research conducted by the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies revealed that Saudi Arabia is the sixth largest oil consumer in the world, and the seventh largest gas consumer. The study also estimated that, in the summer months, Saudi Arabia consumes up to 750 000 barrels per day, which is more than 10 per cent of its total crude oil exports.(6) Saudi Arabia exports more crude oil than any other country, but this consumption level involves massive energy wastage and high levels of pollution which mean losses to the state treasury and a need for the state to constantly pump money into infrastructure development to meet the demand.

**The GCC’s oil and gas reserves**

As shown in Table 1, the GCC countries have sufficient oil and gas reserves, with 30 per cent of the world’s total crude oil reserves and 21 per cent of the world’s natural gas. In addition to being the world’s top exporter of crude oil, Saudi Arabia became the world’s largest producer of black gold in 2013. This occurred when political instability in Libya, Syria and Yemen slowed down or stopped oil production in those countries, and Iran’s oil production was restricted because of the West’s response to Iran’s nuclear programme.

Qatar is distinct from other GCC countries because of its huge reserves of gas, and large LNG trains. Qatar is currently the world’s largest exporter of LNG, meeting approximately a third of the global demand for gas. This enhances the centrality of the GCC countries in the international energy sector, as Qatar exports LNG to Japan, South Korea, India, Spain, Britain and the United States, amongst other nations. In 1992, Japan’s Chubu Electric Power Company was the first country to seal a deal to import LNG
from Qatar, with the first shipment of Qatari LNG delivered to the Japanese company in 1997, launching a new phase of growth and development for Qatar’s economy. According to BP, Qatar’s LNG production capacity reached about 77 million tons annually in 2013, and is capable of increasing further if the demand for LNG grows.

Other than Qatar, indications are that the GCC countries may be obliged to import gas in the coming years as one possible means of meeting growing domestic energy demands in their own countries. This is not necessarily because of problems with their oil-production capacities or dwindling reserves, but because they have long-term supply contracts with importing companies, as is standard practice in the energy sector, and they may not have sufficient capacity to meet the developmental needs of their own manufacturing and public sectors.(7)

**Shale gas and oil**

The exploitation of shale gas reserves in the United States—and to a lesser extent in China—may change the entire energy sector, including in the GCC countries. The extraction of shale gas is a controversial and risky process that requires sophisticated technology, but considerable progress has been made,(8) and some studies indicate that shale gas accounted for as much as 15 per cent of the global gas supply in 2013. This figure is expected to reach 50 per cent within the next twenty years, given the ever-increasing demand for electricity, as well as from the industrial sector.

As of 2014, shale gas comprised 40 per cent of total production of natural gas in the US. Shale oil reserves could reach nearly 345 billion barrels in the next few years, through the use of cutting-edge technology. This figure is close to the combined volume of oil reserves held by both Saudi Arabia and Venezuela (298 billion barrels and 265 billion barrels, respectively)(9)

It is widely believed that the availability of large quantities of US shale oil contributed to the decline in oil prices in the second half of 2014. Increased global energy supply and a falling demand for oil had—and is still having—an impact on oil prices. It is not clear whether the low oil prices will affect US shale oil production, but they may well do so given the high costs involved in shale oil extraction when compared to the price of crude oil. According to a report published by Al-Awasat in November 2014, shale-oil prices are more affected by low prices than those for conventional crude oil.
Conclusion

The GCC countries have high levels of alternative energy resources, not just crude oil and natural gas. While it’s true that the six member states do not have coal, the many months of sunshine that characterise the region’s climate are ideal for harvesting solar energy. Wind energy is also a viable option, especially in Saudi Arabia due to the vast open spaces. Regarding nuclear energy, the UAE is already pressing ahead with plans to build nuclear power stations.

The oil sector is expected to maintain its importance in the global economy given the ongoing demand for motor fuel, diesel and others petroleum products, and because practical and efficient alternatives are proving difficult to find.

Despite the growing importance of shale gas and oil in the United States and China, the GCC countries collectively remain one of the cornerstones of the global oil and gas sectors, in terms of discovered reserves and production.

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The year 2014 was a difficult year for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with challenges and crises so severe that they threatened its very existence as a co-operative umbrella body for its six member states.

In March 2014, an event took place that was unprecedented in the GCC’s history: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Qatar. The ambassadors’ recall was the culmination of several heated political disputes related to the so-called Arab Spring revolutions. It took eight months for the crisis to finally let up, and that happened only after the GCC’s leaders met at a special meeting in Riyadh on 16 November. The three ambassadors then returned to Doha, just days before the GCC’s 35th annual summit was held in the Qatari capital on 9 December 9.

But this crisis of confidence, despite being the most public and the most grave, was by no means the only challenge facing the GCC, and raising big questions about its future. A bundle of intersecting and connected challenges and security issues arose in 2014 that are linked to the dramatic developments and geopolitical shifts in the greater Middle East, which cannot be seen as being entirely separate from the repercussions of the
sometimes devastating changes occurring in some of the Arab Spring countries, as discussed in the preface to this collection.

In this context, and in light of the views presented by the assembly of GCC experts, researchers and academics in this collection, a number of conclusions can be drawn about levels of cooperation within the GCC and possible paths that this might take in the future.

1. Security was a dominant motivating factor in the establishment of the GCC in the early 1980s, and prevailing regional and international circumstances kept defence and security at the top of the GCC’s agenda for the first two decades of its existence. That said, the political, social, economic and cultural traits and heritage shared by the six member states have helped to facilitate and enable their integration, and these seem likely to remain perfectly valid catalysts for the development of ever-deeper ties between the member states in the years to come.

2. Although the GCC states emphasise that the security of the Gulf lies in the hands of its citizens, in relation to Iran, the GCC has historically made a distinction between the security of its members and the security of the Gulf as a whole. Thus, the GCC stood by Iraq in its war against Iran in the 1980s. Contrary to the views often expressed by Iran, the GCC has stressed that the security of the GCC is fundamental to Arab security.

3. Public opinion wasn’t extensively canvassed when the establishment of the GCC was first announced. With the whirlwind of events that the GCC has experienced in the decades since then (the most momentous of which was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990), unity doesn’t seem to have been very high on the agenda of ordinary citizens in the six member states. Most citizens seemed to see security and political co-ordination as the most significant common interests between the member states, but changed after the Arab Spring. Popular calls for unity increased, and unity now seems to be considered more of a necessity than an optional extra in preserving the wellbeing and prosperity of the GCC states.

4. The factors that encourage the six member states achieve economic and fiscal integration, and to work together as an economically unified and co-ordinated body, are far greater than any that might tempt them to act separately. Such factors include their geographical proximity, and their common cultural and social heritage. These have led to the development similar legislative and administrative
systems, thus making it easier for the authorities to consolidate and standardise systems related to matters such as customs and trade and travel, etc.

5. Despite the progress that each of the member states has made in terms of economic co-operation, a number of hurdles continue to thwart stronger co-operation and co-ordination. These hurdles relate partly to the private sector’s limited contribution to economic activity, and the failure of the authorities to create an appropriate environment for private-sector growth. This in turn has prevented the GCC’s financial markets from moving more quickly towards integration. In addition, a virtual lack of shared data and databases related to national economic activities, and the separation of investment opportunities and legislative frameworks among GCC states are real obstacles to stronger co-operation.

6. To achieve greater economic integration, stronger co-ordination between member states is needed. Ideally this co-ordination should also ensure that greater benefits devolve to the smaller, less powerful members. For example, the offices of the GCC’s various different institutions could be distributed between the GCC states, and, wherever possible, systems should be so robust that political matters cannot disrupt economic co-operation.

7. At the time of the GCC’s establishment, military co-operation wasn’t very high on the GCC’s agenda. This quickly changed, however, when the Iran–Iraq War intensified; the GCC states signed a comprehensive military agreement in 1982. Since then, the reasons for military co-operation failing to develop more quickly can be attributed partly to the secretive nature of military operations, and partly to the fact that several foreign states have interests in various GCC states. Nevertheless, higher levels of military co-operation have developed gradually, thus creating a sound framework for stronger co-ordination should the need arise.

8. Given the current political insecurity in the Gulf region (and specifically in Iraq, Iran and Yemen), the GCC countries have shifted away from simply acknowledging that they face common dangers to actually finding ways to address these militarily. Perhaps, the greatest obstacle to stronger GCC security co-operation lies in persuading GCC decision makers that their security is in the interests of the region and the international community, and should therefore be protected by a military force greater than any of the separate forces that the GCC countries can provide at present.
9. Given the increasing chaos in the region, unity among the six member states has become more of a necessity than a choice. The GCC could morph into a much stronger and more powerful force, thus taking much of the burden off each of the individual member states. The main challenges making unity ever more urgent are the strategic exposure of some of the member states, uncertainty about the future of the global energy industry, and the fact that other strong economies are emerging in the region. Other important factors are population growth and the political and economic shortcomings of some member states.

10. The strongest, and most sensible model on which to base the hoped-for GCC Union is economic and political co-operation. This would make integration possible within a secure regional and international framework, and help to eliminate the possibility of nations resorting to violence as a means of resolving disputes. In this context, each of the GCC states must seriously consider how well suited they would be to a confederacy that preserves their individual sovereignty while maintaining a unified outlook.

11. The high-pressure regional context in which they are situated has twice forced the GCC states to reposition themselves to improve their geopolitical standing and insulate themselves from potential dangers and threats. The first attempt at repositioning was when the GCC came under immense pressure from various geopolitical quarters in the late 1970s and early 1980s; this resulted in the establishment of the GCC in 1981. The second attempt has been ongoing since the uprisings of early 2011, and involves a three-pronged strategy, namely: an active foreign policy, bolstering internal co-ordination and integration, and attempting to recruit new members into the GCC.

12. The primary purpose of any expansion policy formulated by the GCC will be to identify and include new members that share the same political values as existing members: that is, countries that have similar political, cultural and economic values, and face similar security concerns. The GCC’s expansion plans might be related to the Arab League’s failure to provide even a minimum level of political, economic, and security co-ordination in the face of threats and challenges. Given the complex political, economic, social and security issues involved, the GCC seems likely to adopt a flexible policy for new members, enabling such states to first acquire observer status rather than full membership.

13. Although, like every other regional structure in the world, the GCC has experienced its share of conflict, the recall of ambassadors from Qatar in early 2014 was by any measure a major rift that shook the GCC to the core. The
danger lay not so much in the fact that this action was unprecedented, but in that it exposed the nature and depth of the disparities between the members in terms of their foreign policies and diplomatic priorities, including the stark contrast between the Arab and regional interests of GCC capitals. The 2014 crisis of confidence will take much hard work to overcome or minimise in terms of the damage it could wreak on the GCC’s integration processes.

14. Although GCC member states displayed considerable reserve in handling the ambassadorial-recall crisis, and were reasonably successful in containing it, their success was largely driven by shared concerns over the security of their region. These concerns forced the six states to close ranks. This unity might be too fragile to last, however, and could disintegrate when calm is restored in the region. Then the conflicting foreign policy agendas that are apparent between power blocs inside the GCC might again become problematic.

15. The GCC lacks a solid, well-established, and clear-cut code that regulates the relationship among member states, focuses on their mutual interests and unifies their foreign policies. Despite this, the common traits shared by the six member states are gradually popularising the concept of Union, as well as aligning their interests and their foreign policies.

16. The political sectarianism and terrorism that is flooding through some neighbouring states are the two gravest challenges facing the GCC. Although the threat of terrorism might be somewhat more remote, the seeds of sectarianism appear to be sprouting in certain GCC countries. Sectarianism and terrorism are inseparable and evil twins that cannot be tackled separately. They manifest in similar ways, and quick, effective solutions must be found to address them on every level – economic, social, political and cultural.

17. In the short term, however, sectarianism and terrorism seem unlikely to seriously undermine the GCC countries. This means that, for now, the GCC remains an oasis of calm in a desert of turmoil. However, just how severe these two threats become in the longer run depends on whether foreign intervention stirs up further sectarian unrest, both within the GCC and in its immediate vicinity. It also depends on the bonds forged between politicians, jihadi and ideological Islamism in the region.

18. For the GCC states to maintain their national unity and protect their social and political stability against terrorism and sectarianism, they must implement a slew of measures, including:
• Building nation states, that is, bolstering a collective national and GCC identity by achieving equality regarding the rights and duties of all citizens, valuing individuals according to their loyalty and merit rather than their sect or tribe, and building a basis for a society in which peace, tolerance and acceptance is the norm.

• Expedite the march towards unity and integration to achieve the hoped-for Gulf Union that would be strong enough to fend off sectarianism, eradicate terrorism and thwart foreign enemies.

• Continue implementing internal reforms, achieving political and social communion with neighbouring countries so as to address sectarian conflicts that divide them (especially Iraq and Yemen.)

19. The GCC countries face serious challenges in securing their water resources, which are rapidly dwindling. Estimates are that, as water-poor countries, all six states will face severe water shortages by 2030. To survive, the GCC countries must find alternative water resources that are more abundant and less costly than desalination.

20. GCC countries will also need to develop alternative sources of energy in the coming decades, so as to maintain the current levels of national revenue from the sale of fossil fuel. Although the GCC countries have vast reserves – especially oil and liquefied natural gas – trends in the global energy market, and the free fall in the price of oil during the last quarter of 2014, make it imperative for GCC countries to invest in alternative energies such as solar and wind power for domestic supply and to maintain their competitive edge in the energy sector.

The GCC member states showed resilience while ironing out the ambassadorial-recall crisis of 2014. Despite the crisis, the states maintained basic levels of coordination and cooperation, and responded to external challenges and threats throughout the year. These two facts alone are sufficient to indicate that GCC’s quest for co-operation and integration is alive and well, and that the organisation is still capable of achieving its ultimate goal: to facilitate increased prosperity, wellbeing and a sense of community between all its member states.