



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 2

The Gulf and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

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Abstract

Up to the end of the last century “Eurasia” was little more than a geographic concept, with little political significance and little real content in terms of connectivity, cooperation and exchange. Now the situation is radically different. At a rate which has surprised most observers, the Eurasian region, from East Asia to Western Europe and from the Indian subcontinent to Russia, has become a region marked by increasing economic cooperation and integration, infrastructural development and political realignment. Countries and regions which had previously been viewed as marginal to the global system (such as Central Asia) have taken on a new importance as links in the vital networks of roads, railways, oil pipelines and telecommunications which are binding the wider region together into an economic unity. On the political side, the Shanghai

Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is central to the development, bringing China, Russia, India, Pakistan and 4 Central Asian countries into a framework of political, and to some extent military and economic, cooperation. The SCO's observer states include Iran and Afghanistan, and its dialogue partners include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have yet to determine how they will relate to the new entity which is taking shape across Eurasia. They are on the southern fringes of the region and will be greatly affected by developments there: economically (with substantial benefits on offer, but also potentially negative effects), politically (in terms of how they align with the new power-groupings which are emerging), and possibly in terms of the infrastructural developments which could link them in to the new cross-continental networks. Although Iran has engaged with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the GCC states have not, which is surprising given that the latter represents a power-bloc (or perhaps a series of power-blocs) which is already re-structuring the channels of power and influence in the world.

The workshop represents an opportunity for Gulf research to branch out into areas not previously covered – in particular the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. These are important in the new power grouping of Eurasia, not just in terms of membership of the SCO but also by virtue their engagement in other organisations which are associated with the SCO, such as the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. They are central to the developments of the Eurasian project, and their relations – existing and potential - with the Gulf states need to be given attention.

Description and Rationale

Objectives and Scope of the Workshop

The workshop will seek to make a contribution relevant to policy-makers within the GCC, by covering an area of policy-related concern which is likely to be critical to the Gulf region in the future. The intention is to attract papers from a wide range of different perspectives and geographical specialisations. Particular attention will be given to attracting Gulf researchers, especially those who are at an early stage in their careers. It is hoped that the workshop will enable them to test out their ideas and that through the workshop they will have access to a range of contacts and expertise which will encourage them to go further in their research.

It is to be noted that the three convenors of this workshop have worked together in convening and participating in Asia-related GRM workshops on a number of previous

occasions. Over the years, an expanding network of those working in this field has been developed, with a wide range of expertise and geographical scope. The forthcoming workshop will open the opportunity for the 2018 participants to join this extensive body of interactive researchers.

Expanding the Reach of Gulf Studies and Gulf Research

As is made clear in the Abstract, this workshop seeks to enter a field of research which has previously been neglected or ignored. The reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation may suggest to some that the workshop will be centred on China, but that is not so. The SCO not only brings together the three major Asian and Asian/European powers (Russia, China and India) which are re-shaping the economic and political foundations and dynamics of the Eurasian region, but also (whether as members, observer states or dialogue partners) a wide range of Central Asian, Caucasus and South Asian countries. While there has been considerable earlier research on Gulf relations with China, India and to a lesser extent Russia, there has been very little on Gulf relations with the smaller states (especially in Central Asia) which play a pivotal role in the new Eurasian regional groupings by virtue of their geographical positions. Nor has there been any substantial work on how the GCC countries relate to, or could relate to, the SCO or any of the other associated regional associations which have been emerging in Eurasia.

Much of the focus of the workshop will be future-related. In other words, although at present the Gulf states are not well integrated into the Eurasian region, economically or politically, the significant potential for future development needs to be explored. The intention is to produce analysis which will be of value to Gulf governments and populations in the rapidly-changing environment which they are now facing.

Nonetheless, there are also historical and cultural dimensions to the Gulf's relations with Central Asia (specifically) which are relevant to the ongoing relationships with the states concerned, and which have not previously been previously documented or analysed (unlike the similar relations with India and China). Researchers with interest in these fields would also be welcome.

Anticipated Participants

The perspectives already outlined will indicate the scope and range of the papers which would be relevant to the workshop. Listed below are some central questions which need to be addressed in the course of the workshop, and around which papers could be framed. Given the large number of states involved, papers should not be too narrowly focused,

and where relevant should consider regional perspectives. Papers need to make a specific mention of the workshop title, showing how the paper relates to it. The form taken by papers and the coverage given, however, need to be determined by the proposer.

1. What factors in the shared historical and cultural background of Gulf and Central Asian countries may be relevant in the forging of new relationships?
2. How can the relationship of each Gulf country with the countries of the SCO/Eurasian region be characterised, economically and politically. It is hoped that some papers presented in this field will cover an individual Gulf country's relations with the whole region, so that the relative importance of each part may be clear.
3. How do Russia, China and India view the Gulf in the SCO/Eurasian perspective? Has there been discussion of how the Gulf countries could be brought in to the political structures or infrastructural plans for the region.
4. How do the smaller states of the Central Asian region view the Gulf in the SCO/Eurasian perspective?
5. What are the economic gains which could follow from the establishment of road and rail links between the Gulf countries and the SCO/Eurasia region? Conversely what losses follow from not establishing such links?
6. What are the gains/possibilities/problems of linking the Gulf up to some of the transnational oil pipelines which are now being developed across the Central Asian region?
7. Is it possible to envisage realistic political scenarios (in addition to feasible engineering schemes), where the links mentioned in item 4 could be brought into existence? This question relates specifically to what is possible in the light of the governmental perspectives of GCC states.
8. What differences are there among GCC countries with respect to how they might view participation in the SCO (whether in an observer or dialogue partner capacity)?
9. What are the institutional structures and activities within the SCO which Gulf states would have the greatest interest in?
10. Could Russia, India or China (or all of them collectively) play a role in opening up transit routes between the Gulf and the Eurasian region? Do they have a political incentive to pursue such an objective?
11. In the absence of direct transit routes for trade, are there nonetheless significant opportunities for opening up and developing relations between the Gulf states and Central Asia – in cultural and social connectivity, telecommunications links, political cooperation and investment flows?
12. Given that Turkey and Iran have already established links with the SCO, what lessons from their experience could be useful for the GCC countries?
13. How do the SCO members and the Gulf countries interact and cooperate within regional organisations, such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-

Building in Asia (CICA), in which all the eight SCO members (China, Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan), and five Gulf countries (Iran, Iraq, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain) are among the 26 members, with the Arab League being an observer.

Workshop Director Profiles

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad Talmiz Ahmad joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1974. Early in his career, he was posted in a number of West Asian countries such as Kuwait, Iraq and Yemen and later, between 1987-90, he was Consul General in Jeddah. He also held positions in the Indian missions in New York, London and Pretoria. He was head of the Gulf and Hajj Division in the Ministry of External Affairs in 1998-2000.

He served as Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia twice (2000-03; 2010-11); Oman (2003-04), and the UAE (2007-10). He was also Additional Secretary for International Cooperation in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in 2004-06, and Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi, in 2006-07. In July 2011, the Saudi Government conferred on him the King Abdul Aziz Medal First Class for his contribution to the promotion of Indo – Saudi relations.

After retirement from foreign service in 2011, he worked in the corporate sector in Dubai for four years. He is now a full-time academic and holds the Ram Sathe Chair in International Studies, Symbiosis International University, Pune.

He has published three books: *Reform in the Arab World: External Influences and Regional Debates* (2005), *Children of Abraham at War: The Clash of Messianic Militarisms* (2010) and *The Islamist Challenge in West Asia: Doctrinal and Political Competitions after the Arab Spring* (2013). He writes regularly in the Indian and West Asian media and lectures on political Islam, the politics of West Asia and the Indian Ocean, and energy security issues.

Prof. Tim Niblock is Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of Exeter. He is also currently Visiting Professor at Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, and has held the position of Vice-President of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies, and Vice-President of the British Society for Middle East Studies. He was the founding Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, and previously served at the University of Khartoum, the University of Reading, and the University of Durham.

Among his published books are: *The United States and the Gulf: Shifting Pressures, Strategies and Alignments* (jointly edited with Steve Hook); *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region* (edited, with Yang Guang, 2014); *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations*

in the 21st Century. *The Local to Global Transformation* (edited, with Monica Malik, 2013), *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (2007), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (2006), 'Pariah States' and Sanctions in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya and Sudan (2001), *Class and Power in Sudan* (1987), *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (edited, 1982), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (edited, 1981), and *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (edited, 1980).

Prof. Degang Sun is Professor and Deputy Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China. He was an academic visitor to the Middle East Centre, Oxford University, and Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013). His research interest is China and the Middle East. His most recent works are: *Quasi-alliance Diplomacy in Theory and Practice: An Empirical Studies of the Relations between Great Powers and the Middle East* (Beijing: World Affairs, 2012); "China's Response to the Revolts in the Arab World: A Case of Pragmatic Diplomacy," (*Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2014, with Professor Yahia Zoubir); and "China's Economic Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries: Challenges Ahead?" (*Journal of Contemporary China*, forthcoming, with Prof. Yahia Zoubir).

Selected Readings

It is hoped that contributors will take note of the series of Gerlach publications which have emerged from earlier Gulf Research Meetings on Gulf relations with the external world (especially those with Asian and African countries). The three convenors have contributed substantively to these works. The publications are:

Niblock, T (ed), with Monica Malik, *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century*. Berlin and London: Gerlach (2012).

Niblock, T (ed), with Yang Guang, *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region*. Berlin: Gerlach (2013).

Gupta, R, Abubaker Bagader, Talmiz Ahmad, and N.Janardhan (eds), *A New Gulf Security Architecture: Prospects and Challenges for an Asian Role*. Berlin: Gerlach (2014).

Hook, S, and Tim Niblock (eds), *The United States and the Gulf*. Berlin: Gerlach (2015).

Abusharaf, R.M., and Dale Eickelman (eds), *Africa and the Gulf Region: Blurred Boundaries and Shifting Ties*. Berlin: Gerlach, 2015.

Niblock, T, with Sun Degang and Alejandra Galindo (eds), *The Arab States of the Gulf and BRICS*. Berlin: Gerlach, 2016.

Niblock, T, with Talmiz Ahmad and Sun Degang (eds), *Conflict Resolution and Creation of a Security Community in the Gulf*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2017.