



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 3

Brexit and the GCC

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Abstract

The UK's decision to leave the European Union (BREXIT) raises important questions about the future trilateral and bilateral relationships of the UK, the EU and the countries of the Gulf. The workshop seeks to address the inter-connected issues of trade and investment flows, and cooperation on political and strategic concerns including counter-terrorism and other security issues. At a time of considerable uncertainties and risk in the international system, the workshop will examine the complexities of the relationship between the UK and EU on the one side and the Gulf States and the GCC, with a multitude of different actors, official and unofficial, national and supranational/multilateral involved.

Description and Rationale

The UK's decision to leave the European Union (BREXIT) raises important questions about the future trilateral and bilateral relationships of the UK, the EU, and the countries of the Gulf. However, for the EU, a deteriorating geopolitical environment in the Southern and Eastern neighbourhood, politico-security turbulence in regions at 'strategic

distance' such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and the Far East, the rise of increasingly transnational challenges like terrorism, climate change, and cyber attacks, and the very crisis of the European project itself, all led to a reflection on the old policies and the adoption in June 2016 of "The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy". While the new pragmatic strategy departs somewhat from previous policies and strategies, the UK's withdrawal from the EU raises additional questions for future relations with the Gulf and the MENA region. The GCC, on the other hand, while facing multiple economic and security challenges is seriously considering the deepening of its integration process and strengthening its strategic dialogues with global partners.

The workshop seeks to address these changing dynamics and examine the interconnected issues of trade and investment flows, cooperation on political and strategic concerns, including counter-terrorism and other security issues. At a time of considerable uncertainty in Europe – whether over migration, terrorism, rising populism and continuing economic and financial difficulties – and uncertainties among Gulf states, as a result of low oil prices and new challenges of demography, as well as the concerns raised in both regions over external threats and challenges in the form of Russia and/or Iran – BREXIT adds a further difficult and complicating dimension. On the other hand, there may be opportunities presented by BREXIT as far as the GCC states are concerned. The aim would therefore be to look at how these challenges and opportunities impact on the countries of the Gulf and the UK and the EU of 27. A multitude of different actors, official and unofficial, national and supranational/multilateral need to be considered. The aim therefore would be to gain papers from different disciplines within academia as well as contributions from officials and other stake-holders.

Existing relations between the UK, the EU and the Gulf is a complex series of bilateral and multilateral relationships that cover the whole gamut of contemporary international relations. While, for example, there is no trade agreement between the EU and the Gulf, in many sectors, relations are determined by multilateral arrangements. On other financial/investment areas, purely bilateral relations determine policy. On many security issues, too, it is the bilateral relationship that is key. But all these will be directly or indirectly affected by the UK's decision to leave the EU. If triggering the formal exit process waits on the UK decision in 2017, the relevant Treaty provision, Article 50, contains a clause that requires both sides to take account 'of the framework for its future relationship with the Union'. That will clearly require some highly complex negotiation on both sides. The Gulf States, are thus, on the one hand, left awaiting the outcome. On the other hand, the British Trade Minister is already seeking new trade agreements for when the UK actually leaves, which means the GCC countries have some influence on the UK's future economic and financial strength. In fact, the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, attended the 37th GCC Summit in Bahrain on December 6-7, 2016. May

became the first British leader and the first woman to attend the annual gathering of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); she also held meetings with the GCC leaders. The British PM said that the UK must seek to “transform the way we do business” with the region. She was also quoted as saying that “I hope my visit will herald the start of a new chapter in relations between the United Kingdom and the Gulf — a true strategic partnership that enables us to together seize the opportunities ahead and ensure the security and prosperity of our people”.

But the economic position of the Gulf States has itself been undergoing change which creates a new framework for any future UK or EU relationship. The fall in oil prices, rising budgetary deficits, the growing sense of uncertainty over the outcome of focusing on education, whether at university level at home or abroad, in terms of a better educated pool of perhaps under- if not unemployed young people, with an ever larger number of women among them create new demands on Gulf leaders. At the same time, these new societal challenges are complemented by increasing concerns about the fallout from the Arab Spring, especially perhaps from Syria and Iraq, with the threat of Al Qaeda replaced by that of Da’esh or the on-going war in Yemen where GCC member states have been directly involved. Greater involvement in external interventions has had internal and external consequences. Competition and regional conflict especially with Iran amid sectarian tension do not make the situation easier. And all this has been happening in a world where social media has reduced the state’s ability to act as ‘gatekeeper’.

Moreover, future US policy will have many implications for both regions (Europe and the Gulf) and will have an effect on shaping UK/EU-GCC relations. The Obama Doctrine and the US policy of "pivot to Asia" raised a number of concerns in the GCC states that feel encircled by Iran and abandoned by their strategic security partner. The untested Trump Administration, although signalling a change from the Obama era, creates mixed feelings in both the GCC and EU states and they remain perplexed, as do many other states, about the future direction and policy orientation of the newly elected US Administration.

Some of these issues are matched even if in different socio-economic circumstances by concerns in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, whether in terms of the threat of extremism and terrorism – including the threat posed by returnees from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq – of migration and unemployment, and demographics – if Gulf concerns over demographic changes, for example, relate to youth, those in the UK and EU relate more to ageing population. And many see other existential threats – in Europe, a re-assertive Russia, in the Gulf, a de-sanctioned Iran. Whereas the economic crisis in Europe may have led to defense cuts, at a time when the UK and others have sometimes been looked to take up the slack brought about by the US so-called ‘pivot’ to the Pacific and Trump's

pre-election rhetoric about European defense and the role of NATO – not least by continuing to provide arms despite the increased controversy of such sales in some UK media – the prospect of BREXIT brings with it not simply economic uncertainties but a possible inward-lookingness that reinforces a growing sense of ‘risk-aversion’ on the part of the public and policy-makers and a wider more unpredictable populism. Besides, the negotiations on BREXIT are so complex and wide ranging they are likely to distract much of British attention, not least that of the Prime Minister.

The UK/EU-Gulf relationship takes place in other words within a highly complex interconnected set of conditions made even more difficult and sensitive by BREXIT. The aim of the workshop would therefore be to look at how these challenges impact on the Gulf States as well as the UK and the EU of 27 and on their future relations. It is a project that demands attention from different academic disciplines and calls for contributions from officials and other stakeholders.

Anticipated Participants

The theme of the workshop will be wide-ranging as the topic itself and papers will include, though will not be limited to, issues such as:

- Account of the current EU-UK-GCC relations
- Trade/investments and political cooperation
- Regional dynamics in the Gulf and Europe and the impact on the EU-GCC relations
- BREXIT and Gulf-EU relations
- UK/EU and the GCC
- A de-sanctioned Iran and the UK/EU-GCC relations
- Migration, extremism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and UK-EU-Gulf relations
- Populism in Europe and conservatism in the Gulf and how they affect future relations
- Terrorism and counter-terrorism cooperation
- Security cooperation
- Gulf economic planning and the role of intra-regional cooperation
- The effect of the fall of oil prices and economic and financial challenges
- GCC integration and cooperation and UK-EU relations
- Building human capacity and education and the move towards knowledge-based economy in the Gulf
- The role of the US in the UK/EU-GCC relations
- The assertive Gulf; Gulf Union and strategic dialogues

- Syria, Iraq, Yemen within the context of UK/EU-GCC relations

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr Abdullah Baabood is the Director of the Gulf Studies Center at the College of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of international relations, international political economy especially globalization and regionalism, security and energy studies. He particularly focuses on the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and their economic, social and political development as well as external relations.

Abdullah's publications include:

A chapter, in Maaïke Warnaar, Luciano Zaccara and Paul Aarts (eds, *Iran's Relations with the Arab States of the Gulf: Common Interests over Historic Rivalry*) (Gerlach Press-GRM Series, Berlin, forthcoming 2016);

- "Oman Foreign Policy," in Khalid Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (eds), *The Gulf Small States: Foreign and Security Policies*, (Routledge, forthcoming);

- Mohseni, Payam. *Iran and the Arab World after the Nuclear Deal*. Cambridge, Mass.: Report for Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2015. <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/Impact%20on%20Arab%20World%20-%20Web.pdf>;

- Gulf between East and West in *The Rising Gulf, The New Ambitions of the Gulf Monarchies, Report*, e-book, 2015;

- Changing Global Dynamics between the Gulf, the US, and Asia: Implications for the EU in *The Gulf Monarchies Beyond the Arab Spring. Changes and Challenges*. 2015 <http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/rising-gulf-new-ambitions-gulf-monarchies-13880>;

- Gulf Countries and Arab transitions: Role, Support and Effects in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2014*, Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), 2014.

- "Implications for EU-GCC Policy" in Ana Echagüe (ed.), *The Gulf States and the Arab Uprising*, FRIDE and the Gulf Research Center 2013, p. 87-94, also available at http://www.fride.org/download/The_Gulf_States_and_the_Arab_Uprisings.pdf.

- "Future Role of Great Powers in Gulf Security; USA, UK, France and NATO" in Mohammed Badri and Jamal Abdulla (eds.), *The Gulf in a Changing Strategic Environment* (al Khaleej fi siyaq estrateegy motaghair' (Aljazeera Centre for Studies: January 2014).

In Arabic:

- 2011: “Decreasing Investments of Gulf Countries in the Mediterranean Region” in *Med*, 2011, in the Euro-Mediterranean Space, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), Barcelona, p.228-233. Also available at: http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anuari/med.2011/Baabood_en.pdf
- 2010: Europe and the Gulf: Balance and Future Perspective, in *The European Union and the Arab World, What the Arabs Think and Expect from Europe?* Casa Arabe, CIDOB, Spain, p. 42-50;
- “The Growing Economic Presence of Gulf Countries in the Mediterranean Region” in *Med*, 2009, in the Euro-Mediterranean Space, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), Barcelona, p.203-209. Also available at: <http://www.iemed.org/anuari/2009/aarticles/a203.pdf>.
- “Gulf- Europe Relations: Constraints and Opportunities”, in *Gulf Yearbook 2008-2009*, Gulf Research Center, Dubai, p.141-155;
- EU-GCC Cooperation in the Context of Globalization and Regional Development, in Christian Koch (ed.), *Fostering EU-Italy-GCC Cooperation, the Political Economic and Energy Dimensions*, Istituto Affari Internazionali and Gulf Research Center, 2008.

Dr. Geoffrey Edwards is Deputy Director Europe @POLIS; Reader Emeritus in European Studies, University of Cambridge; Jean Monnet chair in Political Science, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge; Emeritus Fellow, Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Recent publications include:

- 'The Public Face of a Proto-Something: Diplomacy and the European Union' *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 25 2014;
- 'The EU's Foreign Policy and the Search for Effect' September 2013;
- 'Diplomacy and the CFSP: With New Hands on the Wheel, Have We Something that's Real?' in Sven Biscop and Richard Whitman (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of European Security*, Routledge 2012;
- 'Europe's Neighbourhood and Transboundary Differentiation' in Kenneth Dyson & Angelos Sepos (eds) *Whose Europe? The Politics of Differentiated Integration*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- 'Conceptualizing the Middle East as a Region of Strategic Interest: a Critical Assessment of the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy' in Christian-Peter Hanelt & Almut Möller *Bound to Cooperate – European and the Middle East II*, Verlag Berelsmann Stiftung, 2008;
- 'The Construction of Ambiguity and the Limits of Attraction: Europe and its Neighbourhood Policy' *Journal of European Integration* vol 30 no 1 March 2008 pp 45-

62; re-issued in: Jones, Erik & Van Genugten, Saskia (eds) *The Future of European Foreign Policy*, Routledge 2009;
- 'Reinforcing Ambivalence: the Interaction of Gulf States and the European Union' co-authored with Abdulla Baabood *European Foreign Affairs Review* vol 12 no 4 2007 pp 537-554.