



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

### Workshop 3

## **The Gulf Cooperation Council and the BRICS**

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### **Abstract**

How the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries relate to the rest of the world has been a key concern of both academics and politicians in recent years. Considerable effort has been devoted to examining the changing relationship between GCC countries and the Western powers and also to the growing links between the GCC countries and other Asian countries. So far, however, virtually no attention has been given to the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping – as an organization and collective entity, as opposed to the individual countries in that grouping. Yet, this is a group of countries which, in terms of how they fit into the global economic structure, would seem to have much in common with GCC countries: experiencing rapid economic growth which is giving them a substantial stake in the development of the global economy; having interests which are on occasion at variance with those of the established “heavyweights” of the global international political economy; pursuing concerted campaigns aimed at reshaping global economic practice in ways which are more

favorable to their own interests; resisting some of the pressures emanating from those international bodies which promote the “Washington Consensus,” with a view to safeguarding not only their specific short-term interests but also the long-term ability to retain control of their political-economic future; and seeking South-South relationships so as to balance the relations which they have with Western economies. It may also be the case that, in some spheres (but not in others), there are elements of political alignment also. The workshop will examine the extent to which the possible commonalities could create the basis for the GCC either to associate themselves more closely with the BRICS grouping, or perhaps even to move towards expanding it to BRICSAG.

## **Description and Rationale**

The ideas framing this proposal have been laid out in the Abstract. The workshop will be structured in a manner which enables these themes to be effectively pursued, leading up to a clear conclusion and hopefully also with recommendations for how the GCC countries and the BRICS countries could proceed in developing more areas of mutual cooperation and coordination.

Contributions are not expected to be simply about bilateral relations between individual GCC countries and individual BRICS countries (although these may figure as case studies located within a wider analysis of GCC-BRICS relations), but rather to focus on the general issues which affect the GCC-BRICS relationship. Nor should it be assumed that there is a “natural fit” between the GCC and BRICS. The workshop, rather, will be based on an open-minded discussion of both complementarities and conflicting interests, with no *a priori* assumption that the former outweigh the latter. The Abstract states that the GCC countries and the BRICS countries “would seem to have” much in common, but whether the seeming commonality has a reality behind it is an open question – and one on which participants in the workshop may (and probably will) have different views. The objective is to provide analyses from which those with responsibility for interstate relations in the GCC states and the BRICS states can benefit, whatever use they may choose to make of this.

Although the BRICS grouping consists only of the five countries whose initial letters appear in the moniker, this does not mean that the role of other countries (as well as the GCC ones) should be excluded from consideration. The BRICS grouping, in addition to constituting an organization which links five specific countries (facilitating joint action by them at the global level), also represents an idea which has a more broadly-based country representation. Each of the five countries is a major regional leader, able to articulate wider regional needs and demands at the global level. The interests of Brazil, for example, are very similar to those of the other major emerging economic powers of Latin America (especially Argentina and Mexico); the interests of Russia are linked to

those of some of the Caucasus and Central Asian republics (although in this case with more dominance from the Russian side); the interests of South Africa are often articulated within a wider African context, and a degree of cooperation exists not only with the countries of the South African Development Community (SADC) but also with some other fast-growing African economies – Nigeria and Ethiopia in particular; and China's and India's global economic interests are similar to those of other rapidly-industrializing Asian states. Contributions which relate to other countries as well as the five BRICS countries, therefore, are also encouraged.

Similarly, although the focus is on the GCC states (from the Gulf side), this should not be taken to mean that Iraq and Iran are excluded from consideration. On the contrary, papers can also bring in issues about how both of those countries relate to BRICS, and how this might impinge on GCC attitudes/policies.

The contributions sought are not just in the economic sphere. Indeed, the existence of economic complementarities in themselves provides little basis for envisaging actual cooperation, integration, or coordination. The BRICS countries pursue rather different political agendas in global politics, yet there are also spheres in which they have overlapping political perspectives. These have, indeed, been critical to some of the issues which have come before the United Nations in recent years. The coherence of BRICS as a grouping rests not only on the perception of common economic interests but also on these elements of perceived political commonality – even though the latter may not be equally shared by all BRICS countries and despite the commonality sometimes resting only on a shared scepticism of Western policies in non-Western countries. It is important to consider, therefore, what (if any) elements of political commonality the GCC countries have with BRICS countries, and whether these are sufficiently strong to provide the incentive to act together economically and politically.

Clearly there are some issue-areas where the BRICS and GCC countries have liaised together closely, such as in negotiations about and around the WTO, in discussions on energy matters, and on some United Nations Security Council issues such as the Brazilian proposals over humanitarian intervention. At the same time there have been regional Middle Eastern issues where the BRICS countries have positioned themselves differently from the GCC countries – especially on the events which followed the Arab Spring, especially in Libya and Syria.

While all of those with interest in this field are encouraged to submit paper proposals, the convenors are particularly eager to attract young researchers/academics from the countries concerned. The workshop will in this way, it is hoped, not only contribute to the richness of the field of Gulf Studies but also bring the new generation of researchers in the GCC together with some of their counterparts in African, Latin American and Asian countries.

The structuring of the workshop schedule will depend on the papers submitted/chosen, but it will open with a paper by one of the convenors covering the nature of BRICS, its organizational forms, the complementarity of the global economic strategies pursued by the five countries concerned, the record of the meetings held so far, the success/failure of the collective strategies pursued at the global level, the links with other organizations which impinge on relations between the countries concerned (such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), and the extent to which the BRICS body has political underpinnings. Initial comments on how this may relate to the GCC will then be made.

### **Anticipated Participants**

Following the initial paper, it is expected that there would be 12-16 papers, covering as wide a range as possible of topics relevant to the workshop theme. Among those which would be relevant are:

- China's role in BRICS and the relevance of this to China-GCC relations: complementarities and conflicting interests
- India's role in BRICS and the relevance of this to India-GCC relations: complementarities and conflicting interests
- South Africa's role in BRICS and the relevance of this to South Africa-GCC relations: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Brazil's role in BRICS and the relevance of this to Brazil-GCC relations: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Russia's role in BRICS and the relevance of this to Russia-GCC relations: complementarities and conflicting interests
- The GCC and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Saudi Arabia and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Kuwait and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- The UAE and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Qatar and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Bahrain and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Oman and BRICS: complementarities and conflicting interests
- Central Asia, Russia, and the development of BRICS-GCC links
- Mexico, Brazil, and the development of BRICS-GCC links
- Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, and the development of BRICS-GCC links
- East, South, and Southeast Asia and the development of BRICS-GCC links
- Political and economic cooperation: the dynamics of BRICS and how this may relate to the GCC

The above listing, however, consists of suggested possibilities, rather than options among which choice should be made. It would be possible to combine some of the topics in one paper, or else to suggest a different angle.

## **Workshop Director Profiles**

**Dr. Alejandra Galindo Marines** specializes in Middle East politics with a focus on the Gulf area. She is currently Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the Universidad de Monterrey, México. Her areas of research interest include citizenship and gender, as well as international relations of the Arab Gulf. She has conducted field research on Saudi Arabia and Yemen on the topic of gender, in addition to studying the relationships of some Latin American countries, including Mexico, towards the Middle East and particularly the Gulf region. Among her recent publications are: “La Diplomacia del petróleo: las relaciones China - Arabia Saudita” (*Estudios de Asia y África* XLV, 1) and “Mexico’s Elusive Foreign Policy towards the Middle East: Between Indifference and Engagement” (*Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, 3).

**Dr. Degang Sun** is Professor and Deputy Director of Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University, China. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in 2006 and conducted a post-doctoral research program at School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Fudan University (2010-2012). He was an academic visitor to University of Hong Kong (2004-2005), Denver University (2007-2008), and Middle East Centre, University of Oxford, and Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013). He was crowned as the “New Century Excellent Talents in Universities” (NCET) by China’s Ministry of Education in 2012. His specialty is great powers’ Middle East policy and Middle East history and security. He has published three books and more than a dozen articles in leading journals in China and abroad.

**Prof. Tim Niblock** is Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of Exeter. He also serves as Vice-President of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies and Vice-Chair of the UK Council for Area Studies Associations. He began his academic career at the University of Khartoum in Sudan (1969-77), where he served as Associate Professor on secondment from the University of Reading. He has since worked at the Universities of Exeter and Durham. Between 1978 and 1993 he was at Exeter, establishing the Middle East Politics Programme there. In 1993, he was appointed Professor of Middle East Politics and Director of the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Durham. In 1999, he returned to the University of Exeter and served as Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies there from 1999 to 2005. He has been an Emeritus Professor of the University since 2008.

He has written widely on the politics, political economy, and international relations of the Arab world. Among his books are: *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century. The Local to Global Transformation* (edited, 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), *Muslim Communities in the New Europe* (edited, with Gerd Nonneman and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1997), *Economic and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East* (edited, with Emma Murphy, 1993), *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).

## **Selected Readings**

There is very little published work which covers (or relates to) the topic of the workshop: the GCC and BRICS. Among the literature dealing specifically with BRICS, reference may be made to the following:

O'Neill, Jim. *The Growth Map: Economic Opportunity in the BRICS and Beyond*. London: Penguin, 2011.

Li Yang. *BRICs and the Global Transformation*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011.

Lin, Yueqin and Zhou Wen, eds. *Blue Book of Emerging Economy: Annual Report on BRICS Social-Economic Development*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011.

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. [Joint Statistical Publication by BRIC Countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China](#). Rio de Janeiro, 2010.

Hooijmaaijers, Bas. "[The BRICs at the UN General Assembly and the consequences for EU Diplomacy](#)." Policy Paper 6, September. Jean Monnet Multilateral Research Network on the Diplomatic System of the European Union, 2011.

Skak, Mette. "[The BRIC Powers as Soft Balancers: Brazil, China, India and Russia](#)." Paper prepared for the 11th annual Aleksanteri Conference, "The Dragon and the Bear: Strategic Choices of Russia and China," Helsinki, November 9-11, 2011.

Stuenkel, Oliver. "[Why BRICS Matters](#)." March 28. e-International Relations, 2012.

Lukov, Vadim. "[A Global Forum for the New Generation: The Role of the BRICS and the Prospects for the Future](#)," January 24, BRICS Information Centre, 2012.

Cooper, Andrew F. "[The G20 and Contested Global Governance: BRICS, Middle Powers and Small States](#)," *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy* 2, no. 3 (2014): pp. 87-109.

With regard to wider questions of how the GCC relates to different parts of the non-Western world, reference may be made to recent publications for which the convenors have been responsible. Each of these publications have bibliographies which lead on to a much wider range of references:

Sun, D & Y. Zoubir (ed.). *Building a New Silk Road: China and the Middle East in the 21st Century*. Beijing: World Affairs Press (2014).

Galindo, A. (ed). *The Gulf and Latin America: An Assessment of Expectations and Challenges*. Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre Cambridge, 2013.

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

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