



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

## Workshop 2

# **The Relationship between the Gulf Countries and Latin America: The Role of Non-State Actors**

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## **Abstract**

The main goal of this workshop is to analyze the role played by non-state actors in forging the relationship between the Gulf and Latin America. This workshop will assess the extent of their input in the promotion of exchanges between the two regions. While the role of government-to-government ties is significant, it is also important to study the role of non-state actors to fully comprehend the dynamics of Gulf-Latin America relations. Transnational companies, business communities, diverse interest groups, and minorities of each region in the two geographical areas, among other actors, play a role in strengthening and widening the links between the two regions.

## **Description and Rationale**

Thanks to globalization, non-state actors currently play an important role in international relations. The revolution in the means of communication has brought the world closer, and it is easier and cheaper to reach faraway places. People, money, news, and consumption patterns, among others, move faster than ever across the globe. This context has also contributed to an increase in the participation of non-state actors in issues of global governance and they have been able to exercise influence in the elaboration and implementation of state foreign policies. Non-state actors, broadly

defined, are international actors who are largely or completely autonomous from the state, emanating from civil society, market economy or political opportunities. These actors play a role in establishing transnational relations by providing their own initiatives and ideas through which civil society groups in various countries can come together, by providing links to various state actors, and by inserting themselves into the public debate and, at least indirectly, contributing to the performance of both the state or other international institutions (Wallace and Josselin 2001: 3-4). In this way, trans-governmental groups that have a certain degree of autonomy from state control, non-government organizations, multinational companies, interest groups, illegal groups, minorities and subunits of the state itself may be considered as non-state actors.

The study of such actors is focused mainly in the areas of global governance and on how they promote certain values and norms. We can cite the examples of non-government organizations (NGOs) that promote policies to ameliorate the effects of climate change, or of NGOs participating alongside governmental organizations (IGOs) to tackle international problems such as poverty and HIV, among others; or NGOs working with business communities and workers to promote fair trade.

This workshop seeks to explore the level and forms of participation of non-state actors, in view of the relative degree of autonomy that these groups have in promoting links between Latin America and the Gulf. The increase of trade between the two regions in the last five years could, to a great extent, be the result of state policies; nonetheless, the private sector has played its part too. There may be a difference in the degree of autonomy and/or participation of the private sector in particular and non-state actors in general between the Gulf and Latin America, due to the different types of political systems. For instance in Latin America, relations between the government and the private sector exist at several levels; due to the process of liberalization experienced since the eighties these links are considered to be an important element in decision-making in the region. In contrast, in the Gulf a centralized decision-making process prevails. However, in the last ten years, Gulf countries have experienced some reforms: for example, in the economic sector, the accession of some countries to the World Trade Organisation, changes in the policies for trade and investment; and at the political level, there is a growing participation in elections and the public appearance of political/religious groups that are allowing for a greater representation of their rights and interests.

For these reasons, it is important to elucidate the nature of participation of business firms and to evaluate the results of their policies in fostering trade and exchanges between the Gulf and Latin America. One factor that helped to increase trade is the coincidence in plans of states in both regions to diversify their trade policies, strengthen the role of private sectors and attract investment to sustain their development. This is reflected in the businessmen forums that were held as part of the Arab-South American Countries Summits that took place in 2005, 2009 and 2012. In general terms, the economies of the two regions are complementary, since most South American countries produce and export primary products but need oil, gas and refined oil related products; on the other hand, the Gulf region possesses large reserves of oil and an important petrochemical sector, as well significant amounts of money to invest in foreign assets through sovereign

funds, but they need food products and alternative places to Europe or United States to diversify their investments.

This workshop also aims to explore the role of minority groups in both regions to determine whether the Arab and Muslims communities in South America or Latino communities in the Gulf have contributed to strengthening relations between the two sides, either through lobbying their host governments or their countries of origin. It is well-known how societies across Latin America mobilized against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, adding pressure to some governments to go against this intervention. Or there are cases where the Arab minorities are well organized and can influence a country's approach towards the Middle East and the Gulf, as for example in the case of Chile and its Palestinian community which lobbies the Chilean government relations on relations with the Gulf countries. Regarding Muslim communities in Latin America, they too could be a factor that can promote linkages across the two regions. Also important to consider would be the role that Latino communities in the Gulf countries play to advance knowledge about Latin America in their host societies. Besides these transnational links, in the last seven years, some illegal groups (guerrilla forces, drug cartels) have extended their relations with Iran, according to some official US sources. Although illegal, they are a factor that can affect the approach of some Gulf countries to the region and that is why these groups' activities also deserve attention.

Against this background, it would be interesting to explore the following questions:

- 1- Are non-state actors relevant in the relationship between Latin America and the Gulf?
- 2- What is the role played by each non-state actor vis-à-vis the state?
- 3- Are sub-units of the state playing a role in the promotion of the relations between the two regions?
- 4- How does a non-state actor target either Latin America or the Gulf as an area of interest?
- 5- How can a non-state actor play a role in the promotion of the links (cultural, social, trade, investment) between the Gulf and Latin America?
- 6- Are the Latin American communities in the Gulf and Arab and Muslim communities in Latin America playing a role in the promotion of relations between the two regions?
- 7- What are the differences in the role played by non-state actors in each region?
- 8- Are there particular areas where non-state actors are more effective in the promotion of the links between the Gulf and Latin America?
- 9- Can the nature of non-state actors' links across the region contribute to consolidate the exchanges between the regions in the near future?

## **Anticipated Papers**

- a) Papers on the role of the private sector's relations to the Gulf or Latin America, (eg. the way companies approached the Latin America and Gulf markets)
- b) Papers dealing with subunits of government –like parliamentarian groups, cities or provinces, etc. and its relations towards the Gulf or Latin America
- c) Papers on illegal activities between these two regions
- d) Papers on the role of Arab communities living in Latin American that promote links towards the Gulf.
- e) Papers on the role of Arab communities living in Latin America and their actions towards the advancement of knowledge on the Gulf.
- f) Papers on the role of Latin American communities living in the Gulf and their actions towards the advancements of knowledge regarding Latin America.
- g) Papers on the role of Latin American communities living in the Gulf and their actions towards strengthening the links between the Gulf and Latin American countries.

## **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).

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