



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 11

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The Future of the GCC as an Institution

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Abstract

Regional security as a concept finds its legal basis in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations entitled “Regional Arrangements” and it included three articles “52, 53, 54”, where Article 52 stipulates that “nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.” According to this legal basis, many regional security organizations were established in the world, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as a comprehensive regional organization that includes 6 homogeneous countries and prevents other countries from joining it. Like other regional organizations, the Cooperation Council has faced many challenges throughout its journey, including the diverging visions of academics about the Council. For instance, there are opinions that see the existence of the Council and the holding of its meetings, whether at the summit or ministerial level, does reflect the will and the necessity for the member states of the continuation of the Council as a collective self-umbrella to preserve the security of the Arabian Gulf. Another set of opinions believe that the Council has not witnessed a significant development in line with the internal transformations witnessed by the Arab Gulf states, in addition to regional and global developments. This requires a scientific discussion to answer several questions, including how to evaluate the experience of the GCC according to the criteria of the emergence and functioning of regional / sub-regional security organizations? How has the GCC responded to changes in the regional environment over four decades? Has the GCC witnessed an institutional development similar to the European Union? How was this reflected in the Council's performance on various issues? What are the priorities that the GCC has had an interest in since its inception until now? What is the impact of proposals to establish regional security formulas on the existence of the Council itself? Does the GCC have integrated strategies to confront the new security threats to the Arab Gulf states, especially cyber and maritime security threats? What is the impact of the escalation of conflict and international competition on the regional role of the GCC?

Description and Rationale

Background

The Gulf Cooperation Council was established on May 25, 1981 and includes 6 countries: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, State of Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Bahrain, and State of Qatar. Although geographical proximity is one of the foundations for the establishment of the Council, the six countries are similar in their political, economic, and social systems, as well as share a common history. The emergence of the Cooperation Council was linked to several security threats faced by the Arab Gulf states, which motivated the common conviction of the leaders of those countries that each country alone is not able to confront these threats. Some of these threats were the success of the 1979 Iranian revolution and its principles which include exporting the revolution and the Gulf states were its first target. Another major threat was the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, in the desire of both sides to change the balance of power in the Arab Gulf region, which was an unprecedented challenge for the Arab Gulf states. Moreover, there was a division amongst the Arab states following the signing of the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel 1978. Additionally, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 at the height of the Cold War, posed a challenge to the Arab Gulf states, with the United States calling for the establishment of a military deployment force to protect oil sources and confront the influence of the Soviet Union.

Despite these threats, which reflects that security environment was the basis for the establishment of the Cooperation Council, this was not significantly reflected in the charter establishing the Council, which includes 22 articles, none of which stipulates security and defense cooperation. Article 4 of the charter stipulated the goal of coordination and integration, leading to unity in the economic and social fields. Perhaps the drafters of the charter wanted cooperation between the Arab Gulf states to adopt a gradual formula like the establishment of the European Union (the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951), starting with the economic goals up to security and defense issues.

This does not mean that security and defense cooperation was not a priority for the Arab Gulf states, but rather found its way through two mechanisms, the first: approval of the establishment of the Peninsula Shield Force in 1982, which witnessed many developments, the last of which was the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council's Unified Military Command to include the Peninsula Shield Force, GCC Unified Command and Control Unified Air Defense Operations Center, and the Unified Maritime Operations Center. The second: the Joint Gulf Defense agreement signed by the Arab Gulf states in 2000. It consists of 12 articles that reflect the vision of the Gulf states that the security of the Gulf is indivisible, especially the second article of that agreement entitled "Aggression and Threat," which stipulates that "Member States consider that any attack on any of them is an attack on all of them and any threat to one of them is a threat to all of them." It is comparable to Article 5 of the charter establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Article 3 of the Gulf Agreement completes the ways to respond to the aggression against one of the Gulf states.

Military cooperation between the Gulf states has witnessed other developments, including the establishment of the Unified Maritime Operations Center in 2014, the approval of the Communications security project in 1995 and the start of its official operation in 2000, the establishment of the Cooperation Belt project in 1995 to link the operations centers of the air force and air defense in the armed forces in the GCC countries, and the first phase started at the end of 2001. Moreover, the joint military training programs were implemented periodically among the GCC states, and cooperation in the economic and social fields had a large share of that cooperation, including the Unified Economic Agreement in 1981 and the Economic Agreement in 2001.

On the institutional level, the Gulf Cooperation Council witnessed several important developments, in which the most important are two mechanisms. The first: is to provide an opportunity for the citizens of the Arab Gulf states to participate in the decision-making of the Council through the establishment of the advisory body in 1997. It consists of 30 members, 5 from each country, and specializes in providing its views on issues referred to it by the Supreme Council. The second: the establishment of a consultative summit in 1999, that is not linked to the official agenda or protocols of the annual Supreme Council summit and is a quick mechanism to discuss any developments that require an urgent meeting at the summit level for the Arab Gulf states.

Like other regional organizations, the Gulf Cooperation Council faced many challenges, including security crises, whether faced by one of its members, such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the events of the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2011. There are also regional crises in which the Arab Gulf states found themselves a party to, such as the Iraq-Iran war 1980-1988 or the Yemen crisis which required a Gulf military intervention in 2015, and the Council was able to manage those crises in a way that achieves maintaining the security of its member states. These crises were a real test for the main three defense goals for any small state which are maintaining their own security, regional and international alliances, and the policy of neutrality.

At the global level, despite the establishment of the GCC, member states whether

individually or on the institutional level were seeking several international partnerships aimed to achieve regional security and global security. The transformations in the international system undoubtedly have an impact on the positions of the Arab Gulf states. Moreover, there is no doubt that the Qatar crisis in 2017 was a major turning point in the course of the Gulf Cooperation Council as a regional organization. In terms of the emergence of new regional security systems, there are important variables to be taken into consideration, such as the change in the concept of the region itself, or rather the emergence of new regions with which members of the Council interact with and either influence or are influenced by them namely the conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean, and the competition in the Horn of Africa. Another important variable to be considered is the emergence of several collective mechanisms aimed at confronting threats to regional security such as the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, as well as some regional groupings such as the Council of Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and the Djibouti Code of Conduct to Combat Maritime Piracy. These mechanisms and alliances include some of the Arab Gulf states that are members of the Council, which raises questions about the impact of these systems on the council's endeavors as a regional security organization.

Objectives and Scope

Based on what has been mentioned and discussed, after 41 years of the GCC's establishment, there is a need for studies to evaluate its performance and the challenges it faced:

- 1) At the level of the Council itself and its ability to achieve the goals stated in the charter and translating this on the ground to meet the aspirations of its citizens.
- 2) At the level of regional security, in light of the changing nature of security threats wherein after the American invasion of Iraq, the severity of the land military threats declined, and the seas and waterways became the new arena for these threats through the attacks on Gulf oil tankers in 2019 and 2021.
- 3) The existence of differences in the foreign policies of the member states and how it is reflected and affects the work of the GCC as a regional organization.
- 4) The global system is witnessing an intensification of conflicts and competition, which took a violent form through the Ukrainian crisis. These and other challenges raise many questions about the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its ability not only to achieve the concept of balance of power for its countries, which is the basis for achieving regional security, but also how to confront the rapidly transforming regional and global reality and what challenges it poses and the opportunities it presents to the regional organization.
- 5) There is a need to study academic and official opinions available on the establishment of a regional security system and its impact on the future of the GCC itself as a regional/sub regional organization.

Contribution the workshop will make to the field of Gulf Studies

This workshop aims to go beyond the mere characterization of the Gulf Cooperation Council as one of the regional/sub-regional security organizations, but rather to study the experience of the Council from the perspective of the statements of thinkers of regional security theories with its development over the past decades. This can be both in terms of the circumstances in which the Council was established, all of which imposed security challenges on the GCC countries as small and medium countries to find a collective framework through which to confront these threats, or in terms of the specificity of the Cooperation Council, where it is noted that regional organizations do not necessarily include homogeneous countries.

However, in the case of the Cooperation Council, the historical, political, economic, social, and cultural common denominators are one of the strengths of the Council, which means that it is distinguished by its specificity from other regional security groupings in other regions of the world. Finally, despite the limited capabilities of the GCC States, especially in security, they were able to manage many security crises within the framework of the Council and even took various common positions towards many regional and international issues, which were reflected in the Council's relations on those levels. Hence, what the workshop aspires to is to evaluate the experience of the Gulf Cooperation Council scientifically from a comprehensive perspective, both in terms of the conditions of origin, development mechanisms, and the challenges of reality and the future in light of a very complex regional environment and a rapidly developing global reality.

Agenda and Potential Topics for papers

- 1) The role of security factors and environment in the emergence of the Cooperation Council and its impact on the Council's journey and development.
- 2) The role of the Cooperation Council towards regional security crises (the Iraqi Iranian war, the Iraqi invasion of the State of Kuwait).
- 3) The vision of the GCC countries for the membership expansion proposals (inclusion of Yemen or Iraq, the proposal to include Jordan and Morocco for membership in the council).
- 4) A comparison between the experience of the Gulf Cooperation Council and other regional organization experiences such as the European Union and ASEAN.
- 5) Obstacles at the institutional level to the development of the Cooperation Council.
- 6) Proposals to develop the dispute settlement mechanism in the Cooperation Council.
- 7) The economic achievements of the Cooperation Council and the identification of the most important obstacles to economic integration.
- 8) Analyzing the GCC strategies to confront security developments (cyber threats, maritime security, energy security, food security).
- 9) The role of the Gulf Cooperation Council towards the regional security threats to the Arab Gulf states, especially the Iranian threats and regional security crises.
- 10) The impact of international conflicts and competition on the work of the Cooperation Council.
- 11) The impact of regional security proposals on the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council such as the Middle East NATO, the multiplicity of alliances to confront security threats.
- 12) The foreign policies of member states and their impact on the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council (case studies).
- 13) The impact of global (decentralized) and regional transformations (new regions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Horn of Africa) on the future of the Cooperation Council in light of the new regional categories.
- 14) Evaluate the impact of the GCC's partnerships with major powers (the United States, Russia, China) on the performance and future of the GCC itself.

Publication Plan

The workshop directors plan to choose the best accepted papers on the subject of the workshop so that the papers are integrated with the aim of providing a comprehensive scientific vision to evaluate that organization from all historical, security, economic and defense aspects, in a balanced manner through regional and international visions.

All papers will be subject to review and editing by the workshop directors, so that there is a guarantee of non-repetition or overlap between them.

Participants will be given a period of three months from mid-July to mid-October 2023 to edit their paper based on the discussions and comments raised about it during the workshop.

The paper should be around 8,000-9,000 words and referencing should be in Chicago Style.

For the proposed publishing house, the workshop directors aim to publish the papers as a book within several publishing houses such as Springer, as one of the workshop directors published two books, the first in 2021 and the second in 2022, and he has experience in publishing procedures and rules, or Routledge or Palgrave.

Recommended Readings

Abdelkhalek, Amira Ahmed. "The Role of Gulf Cooperation Council in Conflict Management, 1981–2019: A Comparative Study." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 9, no. 1 (November 22, 2021): 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477989211057341>.

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Keshk, Ashraf Mohamed. *Maritime Security of the Arab Gulf States: Analysis of Current Threats, Confrontation Mechanisms, and Future Challenges*. Springer Link . Singapore: Springer, 2022. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-19-4246-4>.

Koch, Christian. "The GCC as a Regional Security Organization ." Konrad Adenauer Foundation,

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Workshop Director's CVs

Dr. Haila Al Mekaimi

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Professor of political science at Kuwait University

Member of the Advisory Board of the Supreme Council of Leaders of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

Former Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for Planning and Development Affairs 2013-2017

Member of the Board of Directors of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) 2011

Faculty member in the BA and MA program in the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University

Member of the Executive Board of the Arab Association for Political Science, based in Beirut

Member of the Organization for Caucasian and Central Asian Studies - Harvard University

She holds a PhD in Political Science from Boston College, USA

She holds a master's degree in political science from the University of Wisconsin-USA

She holds a BA in Political Science from Kuwait University

Diploma in Hebrew Studies from University of Wisconsin-USA

Certificate from the Russian Diplomatic Institute on Russian Studies 2004

Member of the Executive Council of UNESCO for the preparation of the General

Conference of the 35th session in Paris (6-23 October 2009)

Working with the European Union in the field of scientific cooperation within the framework of Erasmus Mundus grants, Belgium

External arbitrator for a number of foreign and Arab refereed scientific journals

Head of the European-Gulf Studies Unit at Kuwait University 2018-2019

Supervisor of the Political Club of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students 2018, 2021

Head of the European-Gulf Studies Unit at Kuwait University (2005-2009)

Writer in Al-Qabas newspaper, Al-Nahar Kuwaiti newspaper, and the magazine, Opinions on the Gulf, which is a Saudi monthly magazine

Dr. Ashraf Mohamed Keshk

Dr. Ashraf Mohamed Keshk, is a research fellow and the director of the Strategic and International Studies Program at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies "Derasat" since 2012. He is also the editor-in-chief of "Derasat" journal, a semi-annual publication comprising analyses and studies on strategic, political, international, economic, security, and energy issues, with a special focus on Gulf and Arab affairs. Dr. Keshk holds a PhD degree, with an excellent grade, in Political Science, Cairo University. His thesis was nominated by Cairo University as the best PhD thesis in Political Science in 2009. For more than twenty-five years, Dr. keshk has been specializing in regional security issues of the Arabian Gulf, as well as defense issues, especially the regional and international alliances. He worked as an academic mentor at the NATO Defense College in Rome, as part of the Crisis Management Exercise (CMX) which was conducted from 2009 till 2018 and gave several lectures to the College students. Keshk holds also a Defence Studies diploma from NATO Defense College, which he accomplished during a four-month scholarship, He is the author of five books: Gulf Regional Security Development since 2003: A Study of the Impact of NATO's Strategy, Western Policies towards the Security of the Arabian Gulf, and Egypt's Water Policy towards the Nile Basin Countries in 1990s, NATO and the Gulf Countries: An Analysis of the Fifteen Year Strategic Partnership, and Maritime Security of the Arab Gulf States: Analysis of Current Threats, Confrontation Mechanisms, and Future Challenges.

Keshk has published dozens of papers in reputable regional and international journals which are issued in Arabic, English and Italian. He participated, as well, in a lot of international conferences on security of the Arabian Gulf and NATO policies, including the Gulf Research Center's annual Gulf Research Meeting (GRM), at the University of Cambridge, and many other conferences which were held in Europe. Moreover, he gave many lectures and conducted several training courses on Crisis and Disaster Management; he has taught, for instance, Bahrain's crisis and disaster management strategy to the MA students at the Royal Police Academy in Bahrain. He writes a weekly article in Akhbar Al-Khaleej, a Bahraini newspaper.