



Question (R4.8): Are there impediments to cooperation amongst GCC nations that reduce their effectiveness towards undesirable or adverse regional issues? If so, how could impediments be overcome?

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Executive Summary

Weston Aviles, NSI

Introduction

At the time of the writing of this executive summary, the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) has experienced a diplomatic crisis with three GCC member states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain) cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar (another GCC member state) and remaining GCC members (Kuwait and Oman) attempting to mediate. This event begs the discussion of factors and dynamics that obstruct or cripple cohesion among GCC nations and possible solutions to overcome such obstacles. A thorough understanding of the threats facing the GCC and more specifically, their limitations in responding to them, are crucial to attaining a vigorous and holistic comprehension of the Gulf region.

No SMA contributor contests that there are significant impediments to GCC cooperation. Furthermore, there are no significant disagreements among the authors; rather, each author emphasizes different points of contention and solution. Caban, Feierstein, Ulrichsen, and Sager all agree that the GCC is not a monolithic enterprise; instead, each nation is subject to varied and often competing interests (e.g., economic resources, international political capital, territory etc.). Serwer then further elaborates, “[GCC states] need to all hang together or they’ll all hang separately,” and all authors agree, or at least hint, that effective cooperation among GCC members would benefit each nation domestically and/or internationally. Disagreements and conflicts within the GCC go back decades, and Ulrichsen contends that the formation of the GCC as an institution was completed in such a poor and hasty manner that internal friction was inevitable from the start. The PiX Team provides an overview of the structure of the GCC and explains the purpose and functions of the GCC that span from a forum for joint infrastructure projects to a high level political assembly.

Iran, Foreign Policy, and Political Islam

Continuing the criticism of the design of the GCC, Ulrichsen points out that “the GCC has no explicit treaty-based foreign policy-making power as its founding charter called only for a coordination of foreign policy,” and the rest of the authors all agree that disagreements over foreign policy are a significant source of division within the GCC. Evidence of this division is exemplified by all authors agreeing that Iran is source of attenuation of unity among the GCC (e.g., through proxy conflicts in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, as well as encroaching on territory in the Gulf). Feierstein and Sager posit that GCC members cannot come to a unified response to Iranian antagonism for a variety of reasons, ranging from various economic interest in

Qatar, to Shia extremism in Bahrain and Kuwait. Feierstein provides a useful model of a spectrum with Saudi Arabia on the extreme anti-Iranian side and Oman on the more Iranian friendly side, with the remaining GCC states in between. This spectrum is evident in the current Qatari diplomatic crisis where Feierstein has contended prior to the rift that Iran is exploiting an opportunity in friendlier Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar to sow discord within the GCC and “isolate the Saudis.”

Iran manifests roadblocks to GCC cooperation through the sectarian conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and most prominently, Yemen; however, these flashpoints of conflict can also be viewed through the mechanism of radical/political Islam, through which Iran manipulates them. In this context, the variance among GCC nations in geographical location, socio-economic factors, religious populations and others, present the cracks in GCC cooperation that Iran is able to exacerbate—all to the detriment of the GCC's ability to produce and implement a coherent and unified foreign policy. The role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Yemen is a source of strife among GCC states where the Saudis and Emiratis both “opposed the rise of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood” in opposition to Qatar (Feierstein). And yet in Yemen, the UAE is far more opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood presence than Saudi Arabia (Ulrichsen). Political Islam is particularly concerning to GCC nations that must balance religious extremism with the legitimacy granted by religious institutions to the monarchies. Serwer and Caban recognize the divergence of domestic pressures of GCC nations that in turn deviate the interests of GCC nations from one another; different problems necessitate different solutions that make for weak and compromised policies on the international level.

Military Institutions and Security Structures

GCC nations face a diverse set of geopolitical and socio-economic challenges; foremost among them are concerns about security. Given the internal turmoil of sectarianism and external threat of Iran, coupled with the threat of terrorism that plagues GCC nations on all levels, the need for a cogent and reactive security force is paramount for Gulf regimes. Caban argues that GCC nations are “deficient of professional military forces [which] indicates an inability to perform joint operations; because [they] have limited and ad hoc professional military forces, they have insufficient capacity to work together effectively to thwart undesirable or adverse regional issues.” Caban goes on to describe that many GCC nations have a high ratio of migrant workers to “natural-born citizens vested in the sovereignty of the homeland,” which make recruitment difficult and outsourcing security forces necessary. Efforts by GCC nations to have their officers trained and educated outside the Gulf are being explored by the UAE, as well as hiring foreign military professionals, but there are adverse political and logistical consequences still unfolding as a result of these measures (Caban).

Feierstein agrees with Caban that an inability to perform joint operations is a monumental issue facing GCC nations, but instead emphasizes the root of the problem in the political structures of cooperation among member states. Feierstein notes that the disagreements of member states over the brevity of various threats can be explained through a political perspective. Feierstein argues, “GCC cooperation works best when the issues are apolitical and technocratic in nature, and can be framed in a way that benefits rather than challenges the power and authority of individual states,” and cites historical examples of such cooperation.

Solutions/Overcoming Challenges

Each author has proposed solutions to the challenges they each respectively highlighted in their contribution, again, with a high degree of concurrence. Sager asserts that a tenacious and unambiguous US policy in the region is critical to GCC success. Feierstein concurs with Sager's point of the need for clear US policy in the region, but explicitly stresses Iranian issues as an area of focus. Feierstein also suggests that US must not try to force policy onto the GCC, but rather to cultivate it from within, so as to not feed the propaganda of Gulf regime submission to Western governments. Ulrichsen maintains that political and structural reform of the GCC would be helpful, and the GCC as an organization should focus on ameliorating "administrative mechanisms and less on big-ticket items that are perceived to impinge on sovereignty." In regards to the problems facing GCC security forces that Caban describes in detail, "Developing a program for military officers at the war colleges and a series of annual military exercises would bring together GCC-only armed forces to promote greater familiarity and the development of common doctrine" (Feierstein).

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

William Cabán, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University

Impediments to cooperation amongst GCC nations are endemic and stem from a myriad of socio-cultural issues. These issues include and are not limited to: lack of professional military institutions staffed by natural-born citizens vested in the sovereignty of the homeland, cultural implications shaped by religion, and most importantly the desire to maintain control in the hands of the regions' ultrarich monarchs. These issues are not independent, they affect each other continuously, with the undercurrent being religious ideology. Considering the issue of religion can be discussed endlessly, the primary effort of this discourse will be to address security cooperation, and GCC nations hiring foreign military veterans with operational experience to staff domestic and deployed military forces.

GCC nations' need for professional military forces is exacerbated by internal and external implications and threats. Internal unrest is being caused by disgruntled foreign and natural-born citizens (mostly Sunni) seeking increased political rights (migrants and Arab Spring). External pressures include Iran (Shia) encroaching on island territories in the Gulf (Iran took control of a few disputed islands), and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) some openly backed by Iran (e.g. Houthi rebels in Yemen). The Islamic Military Alliance agreement attempts to pool together regional resources to address known threats. *Being devoid of professional military forces indicates an inability to perform joint operations; because GCC nations have limited and ad hoc professional military forces, they have insufficient capacity to work together effectively to thwart undesirable or adverse regional issues.*

Security Cooperation, Occupational Training, Professional Military Education

Attempts at correcting the GCC nations' military deficiencies are in motion in a variety of ways.

Security Cooperation (SC) with partner nations such as the U.S. and the U.K. are common. SC with foreign militaries typically calls for the U.S. and U.K. to deploy troops to the region to perform Subject Matter Expert (SME) exchanges, give classes on military topics, and hold tactical skill-set courses (marksmanship, land navigation, tactical employment of gear, etc.). Discussions with U.S. personnel who have conducted SC missions in the region indicate that local born troops are of nominal physical fitness (nowhere near Marine Corps standards with few exceptions), and generally lack the drive to become skilled military practitioners. Effort and interest in subject matter is difficult to draw, but the credibility these personnel gain from working with foreign militaries (such as the U.S) is a desired notch in their belt. There is an unspoken idea that if you train with combat experienced American troops, you have achieved a higher level of professionalism, and that associating yourself with them increases your expertise and knowledge. This idea can be seen in U.S. militaries as well. When general purpose troops collaborate with some sort of special operations outfit throughout their career (e.g. MARSOC, Navy SEALs, Rangers, Green Berets, etc.), service members tout that particular tour of duty as something that provides them increased credibility, even though the experience might have been extremely limited in scope; "When I was with MARSOC," "During my time with the SEALs", etc.

GCC military officers attend professional military education in the U.S. and abroad. U.S. student observations and reporting indicates that while these officers are in training they are not inclined to perform competitively (to U.S. standards), and have failed courses in the past. A Middle Eastern officer failed a course not too long ago and was executed upon returning to his home country, so U.S. policy towards failing foreign students has been modified. As such, foreign students (known as International Military Officers or IMOs) usually receive a certificate of participation or attendance, not necessarily a

certificate of completion. This is because many IMO's simply go through the motions in class, participate if necessary, and collect salaries laced with benefits like per diem and cost of living allowances that sometimes dwarf their normal salary. Attending U.S. officer professional military education courses is a sought-after career step for IMO's. Certificates, patches, badges, or pins earned (or purchased) while at these institutions are prominently displayed on uniforms and in offices when they return to inform others the individual attended a foreign military school. Note that the individuals hand selected to attend these courses are usually groomed based on lineage, not necessarily professional capacity.

Enlisted members of foreign militaries do not attend U.S. schools, more specifically, they do not attend professional learning centers for rank required *leadership training* (e.g. Corporal's course, Sergeant's course, etc.) They do, on occasion, attend military occupational schools. Issues arise when trained military members go back to their countries and don't have the assets readily available to them that they did at a U.S. school because either the country doesn't have them, or their doctrine (if they have doctrine) doesn't work in a congruent manner. This is important to understand as officers who are trained at partner nation leadership schools are now challenged with trying to fit the training they just acquired onto a force that isn't prepared to receive the information and insight. It has also been the experience of U.S. Foreign Security Force advisors, that enlisted members of foreign militaries are far less educated in basic tactics and military skills which adds a layer of complexity to advisor missions. This is because many militaries have requirements for officers such as attending a branch specific military academy before applying for a commission.

Outsourcing Military Professionals

GCC nations have had to address the issues of security since their independence (until this time, colonial powers provided regional security), and have done so through the outsourcing of military professionals. Hiring of retired, or prior service foreign military professionals to serve as private security (mercenaries) is a decades old practice in the region. A contributing factor contributing to GCC nations diminished ability to effectively respond to threats is that countries in the region lack a populace willing to join their professional militaries. The relatively low native population is an indicator of this as a large majority of the region's inhabitants are workers from foreign countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

More recently, the U.A.E. has taken to hiring Latin American military professionals from countries like Colombia, Peru, Chile, and El Salvador. The U.S. has invested millions in training Colombians to fight leftist insurgencies and Transnational Criminal Organizations (the FARC and cartels) in what was dubbed by strategists as "Plan Colombia". Peru and Chile are long known to have professional maritime forces (including naval infantry/ Marine Corps'), once having fought each other in a naval battle over territorial claims that are still in dispute. El Salvador has received training from the U.S. and is the only Central American country to participate in operations in the Middle East, where they provided on-base facilities security as most smaller coalition partners have (as opposed to performing combat operations). El Salvador also employs their military as an internal security force to combat violent gangs (like MS-13), granting them experience in fighting a type of counterinsurgency for the last few years themselves.

Latin American soldiers are prime candidates to pull from because they have military experience, and training from some the world's premier military forces. Colombian soldiers' experience in 5 decades of low-intensity counter insurgency battle, at least on paper, provides a level of appeal for the U.A.E. consumer. These would-be recruits also come at a significantly lower premium than, say, former British or U.S. military professionals would. The cost differential is roughly 80% less for what appears to be a competent, reliable sourcing pool, though probably not as extensively trained as the more expensive variety. The recruitment

of active duty Colombian military personnel became an issue for the military as they started experiencing a brawn-drain of their competent and seasoned leaders. So much so, Colombian officials met with Emirati officials to try and stem the flow of troops. Hundreds of trained and experienced Colombian soldiers have left since 2010, when the first contracts for a private military in the U.A.E. began. Nothing came of this meeting.

From entry level soldiers to retired commander's the contracts offer lucrative starting salaries to Colombians, roughly 125-150 USD a day, or about 3300 USD monthly; a small fortune by Colombian standards considering monthly salaries in their capital region come in at just under 700 USD per month for the average professional. Loyal to their paychecks, this private stock of soldiers is also cheaper than maintaining a conventional force offering a "Fed-Ex" type of alternative to security, as opposed to governmental forces being likened to "USPS". Colombian recruits don't always possess the desired tactical skill-set proficiency, and as such take longer to train and employ. This was anticipated and written into the contract, though the level is sometimes lower than expected. Basic training includes physical fitness, marksmanship, checkpoint security, patrolling, communications, crowd control, crisis and disaster response. All this training takes place on a compound in Zayed City, in the U.A.E.

The U.A.E. began fostering the Colombian mercenary concept in 2010, creating a sort-of praetorian guard force for the monarchies. This came at a time when GCC nations didn't know if they could count on allies to support them. The toppling of Mubarak in 2011, the crisis in Crimea in 2014, and complete lack of U.S. intervention during both were indicators that security needed to be taken in to their own hands. Couple this with the increasing encroachment of Iran, who seized an uninhabited island off their coast. As instability in the region steadily increased, the need for solutions that would satisfy national security and commercial concerns was evident. Hired guns would provide protection for facilities and high-rise buildings, to ensure the stability of the country, and maintain a "business as usual" environment. In 2015, when the threat of instability advanced through Yemen, the U.A.E. stepped up its efforts by providing forces to confront Iran backed Houthi rebels. With the Saudis executing air strikes in Yemen (using U.S. targeting and logistical support), the U.A.E. tried to send Colombians abroad to supplement their already deployed national army. This, at first, didn't sit well with the contractors. They pointed to the blatant breach of contract and denied orders. Increasingly lucrative offers were made to entice the Colombians to fight for the U.A.E. in Yemen, and mercenaries who agreed were woken up in the middle of the night and shipped off to battle in October 2015.

Implications

Religion of foreign fighters

Reporting indicates that recruiters for the U.A.E. mercenary Army were specifically instructed to look for candidates that were "*not Muslim*" because "*Muslim soldiers could not be counted on to kill fellow Muslims*". This quote comes from private military industrial complex mogul Erik Prince (former CEO of Blackwater) who was brought on to oversee the recruitment efforts for this project. This concept has been exemplified in other areas where Islamic militaries trained and equipped by the U.S. and others failed to execute missions without advisor or logistical support (most notably the fall of Iraqi soldiers when initially challenged by ISIS). In the case of the U.A.E. we see a nation using a "lessons learned" approach to creating and staffing a security force, being judicial in their planning process, and seemingly realistic in how they are selecting their applicants. It's important to note the U.A.E. is a group of monarchies protecting their assets. In their view (and the view of some outside critics), the people of the U.A.E. are less inclined to join the military for any number of reasons. A lot of the population draws family lines to the leadership, so they feel entitled to not partake in hard labor (evidenced by the high number of imported service industry workers), to include military service. The population is almost 4:1 migrant worker to natural born Sunni citizen. Also

consider, those not necessarily related to the leadership have a relatively easy life purposefully funded by the monarchs to tacitly appease people. The happier a populace, the lower the likelihood for revolt and calls for change to the status quo. Every now and then there is a protest calling for increased political participation, but are usually met with counter protests saying everything is fine, and the countercurrent protestors are jailed (e.g. the U.A.E.-5 and U.A.E.-7, protestors jailed for voicing concern over lack of political discourse).

Provocative Staffing Efforts

Preliminary reporting stated a company owned by Erik Prince was fulfilling the U.A.E. Colombian mercenary contract. However, his lawyer released a statement affirming that Prince's only involvement was in consulting for recruitment of personnel for the project. Prince's involvement is provocative due to the infamous congressional hearings that took place after civilians were killed in a 2007 firefight in Baghdad which caused Erik Prince's company (then named Blackwater) to be investigated. The situation forced a change in U.S. policy, directed by conservative leaders, which states that private military contractors fall under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). This was not the case before hand, the rulesets were unclear, and DoD contractors were rarely charged for crimes committed when deployed to combat zones. Prince liquidated his holdings in Blackwater and moved to Abu Dhabi in 2010 for its "friendly business atmosphere." It is here we see the relationship between Erik Prince and the crown prince blossom.

Initial estimates posed that the private force procured through the recruitment efforts of Erik Prince was formed to protect from uprisings as seen throughout the region related to the Arab Spring. In actuality, this string of deals began before the Arab Spring kicked off, though the timing was convenient. Erik Prince, seizing opportunity to expand his footprint, has made the military industrial complex more openly visible to the world abroad. Still being an American citizen, the question has been posed, did Prince violate U.S. State Department laws by not obtaining a license to sell military services overseas? As of yet, no charges have been brought up regarding this issue. The USG is aware of the situation and has issued statements asserting that it would benefit GCC countries like the U.A.E. to invest in private militaries so they might be taken more seriously by nation-states and non-governmental actors.

Gerald Feierstein, Middle East Institute

A common misconception about the GCC is that it is monolithic and that the individual member states share common views about regional challenges or stress the importance of integrated policies. In neither case is that perception correct. To begin, there are broad disagreements, thinly papered-over, about the nature of regional challenges.

Iran

The outliers on Iran are Saudi Arabia and Oman. Saudi Arabia and Iran have a long history of conflict and competition that pre-dates the 1979 Iranian revolution, which exacerbated the conflict. It is only partially related to sectarian Shi'a-Sunni disagreements. It involves, as well, the perception that each has of the other as the main challenger to its own aspirations for regional dominance. As a result, the Saudis press for policies within the GCC that take the hardest line on Iran. Of the GCC states, the Saudis were:

- most unhappy with the JCPOA;
- most skeptical of Obama Administration efforts to bring Iran into closer engagement with the international community; and
- most supportive of policies that would confront Iran or its proxies militarily and retain political and economic sanctions on Iran for its bad behavior regionally.

Oman, by contrast, perceives Iran in generally positive terms reflecting both the history of Iranian support, especially in the early days of Sultan Qaboos' rule when Iran helped defeat the Dhofar rebellion, and Oman's sectarian identity as the only non-Sunni majority state in the GCC. The Omanis maintain normal diplomatic ties with Iran. Historically, they were sympathetic to Iranian efforts to neutralize nuclear-related sanctions and currently look the other way at Iranian intervention in Yemen. The Omanis are proud of the role they played in facilitating U.S.-Iranian discussions that helped pave the way to agreement on the JCPOA. For their part, the Iranians look to Oman as an ally in their outreach to the international community. As a result of its generally positive outlook on Iran, the Omani leadership is viewed with suspicion by the other GCC leaders.

The other GCC states' positions on Iran fall within the spectrum defined by Saudi and Omani views. The Bahrainis, who see Iran as the major actor stirring Shi'a dissent within Bahrain, share Saudi Arabia's hardline position on Iran. While the UAE is also concerned about Iranian actions in the region, and has joined Saudi Arabia as the most aggressive member of the Saudi-led Coalition challenging Iranian intervention in Yemen, the Emiratis have long had major trade and economic interests with Iran and a large Iranian population residing in Dubai that helps moderate their views on Iran. Similarly, Qatar's position on Iran reflects its economic interests in the massive North Field gas project that it shares with Iran while Kuwait, which has faced challenges in the past from Iranian-inspired Shi'a extremists, has also tried to moderate Iranian-GCC conflict.

The Iranians recognize differences of view within the GCC. Over the past six months, the Kuwaitis have made representations to Iran about the possibility of opening a new dialogue between the GCC states and Iran. President Rouhani has visited Kuwait and Oman and Foreign Minister Zarif has called on the Qatari leadership in Doha. Clearly, the Iranians see an opportunity to divide the Gulf states from Saudi Arabia and isolate the Saudis.

Differences in perception about Iran have greatly complicated efforts to derive a common GCC policy. Nowhere are those differences more pronounced than on the conflict in Yemen. The Saudi-led Coalition sees the Houthi insurgency as a reflection of Iranian efforts to establish a presence on the Arabian Peninsula threatening to Gulf Arab security and stability. The Saudis, at great military, financial, and reputational cost, have pursued a determined policy of driving Iranian influence out of Yemen and ensuring that the Houthis are denied an opportunity to dominate the government in Sana'a. The Omanis have expressed sympathy for the Houthi position and facilitated Iranian support for the Houthis. Sultan Qaboos has also expressed ambiguous views about the importance of retaining Yemeni unity at odds with the official Saudi and Emirati support for Yemen's continuation as a unified state.

Political Islam

Similarly, the GCC states are divided in their views about Islamic extremism and political Islam in ways that complicate their ability to define common positions on issues related to counter-terrorism, Syria, Egypt, or Libya. In particular:

In Yemen, the Emiratis view counter-AQAP operations to be as significant to their interests as the anti-Houthi campaign and have partnered with the U.S. in clearing Mukallah of AQ presence while reducing AQ freedom of movement in Hadramawt and Mahra governorates. The Emiratis are also opposed to the involvement of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, Islah, in the Coalition campaign. The Saudis have been less concerned about AQAP involvement in the campaign and have allowed Salafist elements to operate in the Saudi-Yemeni border area. They maintain close ties with General Ali Mohsin, who is closely associated with Islah and the Salafists.

The Saudis and Emiratis opposed the rise of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, encouraged the Egyptian military to move against the government of Mohammed Morsi, and subsequently provided billions of dollars in assistance to shore up the Sisi government economically. The Qataris, aligned with Turkey, had provided substantial support to the Morsi government and were angered by the Sisi coup d'etat.

Qatar's support for political Islamist groups and individuals, especially offering asylum and a platform to Egyptian fundamentalist preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi, nearly ruptured the GCC and brought Qatar into direct confrontation with the Saudis and the UAE. Although Sheikh Tamim has worked to reduce Qatar's isolation within the GCC and eliminate its outlier role, in particular working to improve relations with Saudi Arabia, tensions persist.

Although less significant, differences over political Islam have also colored the individual policies of the GCC states regarding Libya. The UAE has been most aggressive in teaming with Egypt in support of General Haftar and his resistance not only to violent extremist groups in the east but also toward the UN-supported coalition government in Tripoli. The Saudi and Qatari position has been more neutral and more supportive of the UN effort.

Overcoming Impediments

The differences among the GCC members that impede closer strategic coordination and cooperation represent deeply ingrained political, security, and social perspectives of each of the member states that are unlikely to be resolved without fundamental changes in the individual members' basic world view. As noted above, the member states have been reasonably successful in papering over differences, but often

this has meant lowest common denominator positions within the organization with each of the members left to pursue its own policies outside of the GCC framework. While a complete integration of member state policies is probably unachievable, U.S. leadership can help improve GCC cohesion through several steps:

Lead the development of a common position on Iran: In his meetings with his GCC counterparts, the President should propose that we develop an integrated U.S.-GCC policy towards Iran rather than continue the practice of developing a U.S. policy and then pressing for it to be adopted in the GCC. Preparing an integrated strategy with roles and responsibilities for each party will strengthen GCC buy-in and could accommodate outlier policies by building them into a larger, mutually-agreed strategic framework.

Continue to press for the development of a greater Integrated GCC Security Strategy: Efforts to coordinate member states' defense and security policies, to include joint decisions on weapons systems acquisitions and deployment, have a long and largely unsuccessful history in the GCC. The Obama Administration revived the effort, with an emphasis on developing an integrated ballistic missile defense program. Continuation of that effort, with a focus on building defense cohesion, can help build common perspectives on regional threats and appropriate responses.

Propose GCC-only military training and exercise programs: Develop a program for military officers at the war colleges and also propose that we develop a series of annual military exercises that would bring together GCC-only armed forces to promote greater familiarity and the development of common doctrine.

PiX Team, Tesla Government Services

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Abdulaziz Sager, Gulf Research Center

The self / national interests of each Gulf states always influence decisions and attitudes, and the factor of leadership's competition sometime influence policies.

Having said that in the recent years the GCC states has developed a common and shared sense of threat. We can see an agreement about the source of threat (Terrorism / ISL , Iran , Iraq, Yemen, ...). The differences mostly related to the tactics on who to deal with this threats.

The US policy toward the Gulf region is important in helping to remove impediments and unify strategies. A clear, determine, and implementable US policy could remove any doubts and hesitation. Thus, on the other hand, a weak, unclear US policy will open the doors for differences and conflict amongst the GCC states.

Daniel Serwer, Middle East Institute

Yes, you need only talk with a random Gulfie to hear their complaints about each other. The exceptions are Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which despite their domestic differences seem largely in agreement on Yemen, Syria, and other issues. But in general the Gulf states seem unable to realize that, as Ben Franklin said, they need to all hang together or they'll all hang separately. The Gulf Cooperation Council has not solved this problem, which limits Gulf diplomatic, political, military and economic influence and effectiveness.

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Ph.D, Rice University

Throughout the history of the GCC the bloc has struggled to reach agreement on issues that impinge upon areas of national sovereignty; conversely, most cooperation has been reached on technocratic areas which tend to be apolitical in nature. At its heart, the GCC is a collection of six ruling families in which power is clustered around the individual rulers, who are unwilling to distribute power within their own societies, still less with each other. This has resulted in a series of grandstanding measures, often at the annual GCC Summits, that often have served to highlight the tensions that continue to simmer between member states and that occasionally cannot be kept below the surface. Bahrain and Qatar, for example, did not establish full diplomatic relations until 1997, 26 years after independence and 16 years after the creation of the GCC.

More recently, the Qatari-UAE dispute escalated significantly in 2014 when Emirati authorities discovered that Qatar had not only given refuge to Emirati Islamists who had escaped arrest in the UAE but that several of them had secured public sector jobs in Doha. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia also have had a tense relationship recently, over disagreements concerning developments within their shared Neutral Zone, which resulted in the shutting of onshore and offshore oilfields in 2014-15. Further, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE constitute the two leading partners in the GCC-led coalition in Yemen, they back different groups of Yemenis in-country, and differ greatly in their approaches toward the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood. The dilemma for the GCC-led coalition (and international partners) is that these differences will become increasingly hard to contain the closer Yemen ever gets to a political settlement.

In addition, the GCC lacks the integrative structures that are embedded within the European Union (for example) – there is no GCC equivalent of the European Commission or the European Parliament, and no supra-national mechanism to manage the pooling of sovereignty. This reflects the fact that the GCC came together with extraordinary speed in the spring of 1981 – after years of false starts (which illustrated the lack of consensus over the precise nature of a bloc, the balance of focus on political, economic, or security issues, or whether Iraq should be a part of it) the GCC was put together in just three months between February and May 1981. As part of the rush to strengthen Gulf States’ defensive posture at a time of such regional and external stress, the structure of the GCC emerged out of a series of ad hoc decisions that were not necessarily taken with longer-term institutional legacies in mind.

Further, the GCC has no explicit treaty-based foreign policy-making power as its founding charter called only for a coordination of foreign policy. Its member governments have retained responsibility for almost all aspects of political and economic policy and resisted any limitations on their sovereignty. As a result, these internal weaknesses make it harder for the GCC to leverage influence as a bloc and contribute to the preference of individual states to pursue bilateral economic and commercial relations. Moreover, Saudi Arabia apart, the other five members were still young nations in the process of state and bureaucratic consolidation, and they were also wary of the potential for Saudi dominance or hegemony within the new organization. The smaller states’ fears were exacerbated by the fact that in terms of population, size of armed forces, intra-regional trade flows, and geostrategic importance, there was such a clear imbalance in favor of Saudi Arabia. In part to obviate this imbalance of power, the GCC presented itself from the beginning as a cautious status quo entity that intended to shield its member states and societies from the trans-national spill-over of instability from Iran and Iraq.

The trajectory of security cooperation illustrates both the challenges and the opportunities of enhanced GCC cooperation. A Peninsula Shield Force was established in the 1980s, at the urging of Oman, but it never gained traction, largely because Qatar and the UAE suspected it would increase still further Saudi

dominance of the bloc. After the Gulf War of 1991, attempts to build an Arab security structure in the Gulf, based on the GCC plus Egypt and Syria, similarly failed to overcome simmering rivalries and tensions among the GCC 6 plus 2. An initial attempt to reach an internal security agreement and share information among GCC member states was blocked by the Kuwaiti parliament in 1994. Since 2011, Oman has blocked Saudi efforts to transform the GCC from a cooperative bloc into a more formal union, but it is noticeable that most GCC leaders (with the exception of the King of Bahrain) stayed away from the special consultative summit held in Riyadh in May 2012 to consider the issue. Moreover, while the Peninsula Shield Force was resurrected in 2011 to assist the Bahraini government in restoring order following the uprising there, a Kuwaiti detachment of medics was turned back at the Saudi-Bahraini causeway and not permitted to enter Bahrain.

The passage of the GCC Internal Security Agreement shows how greater progress can be made on issues where they are concerned more with the better working of administrative mechanisms and less on big-ticket items that are perceived to impinge on sovereignty. To be sure, each of the six GCC states had, after 2011, a vested interest in more substantive cooperation on security issues, but the abovementioned Saudi call for a Gulf union went too far for every state bar Bahrain. Instead, cooperation came to revolve around an internal security pact agreed by GCC Interior Ministers at their annual ministerial meeting in November 2012 and endorsed by GCC Heads of State at the GCC's annual Summit in Bahrain the following month. Qatar, as noted above, was the first state to actually ratify the agreement and put it into force, and each of the other states, with the exception of Kuwait, has since followed suit (Kuwait's parliamentary committee on foreign relations has refused to recommend ratification until the government provides a copy of the agreement they are being asked to ratify). Even in the absence of Kuwaiti ratification, however, a spate of arrests of Kuwaiti nationals for criticisms made of other GCC leaders and the conduct of the Saudi-led war in Yemen, as well as anecdotal evidence suggesting that a number of people have been denied entry to Kuwait because they appear on security blacklists in other GCC states, indicates that Kuwait has already signed up to the spirit (if not the letter) of the agreement.

Thus, the experience of GCC cooperation is that it works best when the issues are apolitical and technocratic in nature, and can be framed in a way that benefits rather than challenges the power and authority of individual states. Considerable progress, for example, has been made in GCC committees on harmonization and standardization even as the planned monetary union project fell apart after the UAE pulled out of the single currency in protest at the location of the planned GCC central bank being awarded to Riyadh rather than Abu Dhabi. Taking the politics out of issues is critical to successfully overcoming impediments to cooperation, but even then the one-upmanship that characterizes so many regional projects is sometimes hard to overcome – e.g. the fact that the Gulf has three global airlines, three major international airport hubs, four competing regional financial centers, and other competing infrastructural projects, ports, etc. That said, the reduction in world oil prices and the increasing fiscal pressures on Gulf economies has started to result in cross-border investments and mergers that have the potential to create durable new cooperative mechanisms based, again, on pragmatic common interest.

Biographies

William Cabán

[William Cabán](#) is a regional analyst for the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), a subset of Marine Corps University. Mr. Cabán is also an officer in the Marine Corps Reserve with a background in intelligence, and extensive experience in Security Cooperation and Foreign Internal Defense. His studies include a Bachelor's degree in geography, and a Post-Baccalaureate certificate in Geographic Information Science (GISc.) from City University of New York, Lehman College, where he graduated with honors.

Gerald Feierstein

Jerry Feierstein retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in May 2016 after a 41-year career. At the time of his retirement, Feierstein held the personal rank of Career Minister. Over the course of his career, he served in nine overseas postings, including three tours of duty in Pakistan, as well as tours in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Tunisia. In 2010, President Obama appointed Feierstein U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, where he served until 2013. From 2013 until his retirement, Feierstein was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs.



In addition to his career-long focus on the Near East and South Asia, Feierstein also played a prominent role in developing and implementing State Department policies and programs to counter violent extremism. As Deputy Coordinator and Principal Deputy Coordinator in the State Department's Counter-Terrorism bureau, Feierstein led the development of initiatives to build regional networks to confront extremist groups as well as to counter terrorist financing and promote counter-terrorism messaging. He continued to focus on defeating terrorist groups through his subsequent tours as Deputy Chief of Mission in Pakistan and as Ambassador to Yemen.

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Abdulaziz Sager

Born in Makkah, Saudi Arabia in 1959, Dr. Abdulaziz Sager is chairman and founder of the Gulf Research Center. He is also President of Sager Group Holding in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is active in the fields of information technology, aviation services and investments.

In addition to the work of the Gulf Research Center, Dr. Sager holds numerous other appointments. In November 2003, Dr. Sager was appointed as a member of the Makkah Province Council. He also serves as a member on the advisory board of the Arab Thought Foundation; the Geneva Centre for the



Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF); the Faculty of Economics and Administration of King Abdulaziz University; the Ministry of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); the German Orient Foundation; and sits on the advisory group for the 4th Arab Human Development Report for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He is further part of the Think Tank Leaders Forum of the World Economic Forum and the Council of Councils of the Council on Foreign Relations. In May 2011, Dr. Sager was awarded an honorary fellowship from the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice, Italy.

Dr. Sager has special research interest in Gulf strategic issues and is a frequent contributor and commentator to international and regional media. He regularly participates in regional and international forums and conferences held on issues relevant to the Gulf region.

He is the author of numerous publications including *Combating Violence & Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Gulf Research Center, May 2004); *GCC Political & Economic Strategy towards Post-War Iraq* (GRC, April 2004); *Reforms in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Feasible Solutions* (GRC, September 2003); "Political Reform Measures from a Domestic GCC Perspective," in *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani, eds. (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2006); "Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia" in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman, eds. (London: Hurst & Company, 2005); *Energy Shapes new Gulf Security Architecture*, *Journal of Middle Eastern Geopolitics* (2006); and "Why for all its problems, the EU is still a model for the Arab world," *Europe's World*, no. 14, Spring 2010. He has also been the chief editor for the Gulf Yearbook (2003 to 2009 editions).

Dr. Sager holds a Ph.D in Politics and International Relations from Lancaster University and an M.A. from the University of Kent, United Kingdom and a Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Economics and Administration of King Abdulaziz University.

Daniel Serwer



Daniel Serwer is a Professor of the Practice of Conflict Management, director of the Conflict Management Program and a Senior Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Also a scholar at the Middle East Institute, Daniel Serwer is the author of *Righting the Balance* (Potomac Books, November 2013), editor (with David Smock) of *Facilitating Dialogue* (USIP, 2012) and supervised preparation of *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* (USIP, 2009). *Righting the Balance* focuses on how to strengthen the civilian instruments of American foreign policy to match its strong military arm. *Facilitating Dialogue* analyzes specific cases and best practices in getting people to talk to each other in conflict zones. *Guiding Principles* is the leading compilation of best practices for civilians and military in post-war state-building.

As vice president of the Centers of Innovation at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Serwer led teams working on rule of law, peacebuilding, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, overseeing its peacebuilding work in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq and Sudan and serving as executive director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group. As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at

the Dayton Peace Talks; from 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War. Serwer is a graduate of Haverford College and earned Masters degrees at the University of Chicago and Princeton, where he also did his PhD in history.

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen



Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Ph.D., is a Fellow for the Middle East at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy and the author of four books on the Gulf, including *Insecure Gulf: the End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (2011), *Qatar and the Arab Spring* (2014), *The Gulf States in International Political Economy* (2015), and *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, and Policymaking* (2016).

Weston Aviles

Weston Aviles is an analyst at NSI, Inc. He studied criminology and political science at Arizona State University (BS) with minors in Middle Eastern history and economics, and certificates in political thought and leadership, international studies and religion and conflict. Weston then studied Government at the InterDisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Israel graduate school with a focus in counter-terrorism and security studies (MA). His graduate studies focused on Arab Spring dynamics, international security in the MENA region and radical Islam. Weston is an alumni of the University of Virginia's Semester at Sea program and has participated in several academic programs in Israel to study terrorism and counter-terrorism. Weston is now an analyst for NSI and continues a research focus on Middle Eastern politics and conflict studies.

