

The Emerging Interventionists of the GCC

Dr Karen E. Young



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ABSTRACT

There is a shift occurring within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in which new regional leaders are emerging, buoyed by a decade of unprecedented wealth generation from the 2000s commodities boom and increased foreign investment. Specifically, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have emerged as activist states in their interest and willingness to intervene both militarily and financially in the politics of neighbouring Arab states. Contrary to their collective and individual foreign policies of the last 40 years, the GCC states have intervened in each other's domestic politics and in the domestic politics and revolutions of the wider Middle East and North Africa region. While Saudi Arabia enjoyed a period of dominance among its Gulf Arab neighbours for many years, even occasionally threatening the borders of Qatar and the UAE, the prevailing policy of Gulf states has been non-interference and support for Arab leaders, as a principle of religion and politics. In essence, the evolving nature of interventionism in the GCC is moving away from Saudi dominance towards the emergence of new actors willing to engage in the region and on the international stage. We can trace this policy shift through the simultaneous yet separate evolution of domestic, regional and international political economy. This paper argues that shifts in leadership at the national levels have coincided with larger trends in the regional and international economy which have enabled different, yet both assertive, interventionist foreign policies to emerge from Qatar and the UAE. The result is a moment of financial and military interventionism unprecedented in Arab Gulf politics.

INTRODUCTION

In a dramatic change of foreign policy and positioning within their regional security complex, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have emerged as activist states in their interest and willingness to intervene both militarily and financially in the politics of neighbouring Arab states. In the history of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the prevailing policy of GCC states has been that of non-interference and support for Arab leaders, as a principle of religion and politics. While Saudi Arabia has enjoyed dominance among its Gulf Arab neighbours for many years, even occasionally threatening the borders of Qatar and the UAE, the period of Saudi leadership as the international face of the GCC is waning. There is a critical juncture in the institutional relationship of members of the GCC in which the smaller members, namely the 'late bloomers' Qatar and the UAE, are testing the cohesiveness of the council and exploring their own leadership possibilities. We can trace this policy shift through the simultaneous yet separate evolution of domestic, regional and international politics. The current result is a moment of financial and military interventionism unprecedented in Arab Gulf, and even Middle East, politics.

At the local and regional levels, shifts in leadership and the acceleration of economic growth tied to the rise in hydrocarbon and commodity prices of the early 2000s allowed a new kind of foreign policy to grow in small states like the UAE and Qatar. On the international level, Gulf politics have reacted defensively to the perceived threat of terrorism, ignited by the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the following decade's 'war on terror'. Coupled with a long-standing regional tension between Arab Gulf states and Iran over borders as well as political ideology, military build-ups and conflict rhetoric have increased. As the states of the GCC hyper-militarized with increased spending in defence (welcomed and facilitated by the US and European allies), a regional foreign policy approach has emerged that has a broader and more confident (and perhaps destabilizing) interest in the affairs of other Arab states. In effect, GCC member states have had an opportunity to militarize quickly, with international encouragement, while also building some fundamental institutions of state security and foreign policy. The effect is a rapid incubation period for ambitious and capable military and financial interventions by states like Qatar and the UAE.

There are a number of factors from the local, regional and international levels that have contributed to this shift in foreign policy and approach by Qatar and the UAE; their respective policies are not necessarily in coordination or mutual agreement with each other, nor are policies consistent within the GCC as a whole. This paper addresses the causes of these interventionist policies and contextualizes them in three levels of analysis (domestic, regional and international), arguing that a major shift in international norms and the political economy of traditional 'interventionist' states (P5 members and the US, in particular) have exacerbated a more local and regional process of military activism while the accumulation of wealth that has made it materially possible.

The domestic politics of GCC states are increasingly diverse. The differences in leadership styles, institutional structures, and approaches to reform are all creating new and sometimes conflicting Gulf Arab foreign policy approaches. In short, the local politics of Gulf Arab states find ways to repel and export protest and dissent, while increasing prestige at home. Inside the GCC states, there is diversity of approach towards Iran; some states are more aggressive while others are more wary of

conflict. The relationship with Iran, or a Gulf Arab state's willingness to openly challenge Iran, has created some difference with regard to support for the rebels in Syria and the ruling government in Bahrain, for example. The UAE is much more cautious than Saudi Arabia or Qatar in its public confrontations with Iranian interests, though this policy is also subject to domestic political constraints, federal loyalties and differences.¹ There are also differences in approach to political organizations with an Islamist (or even populist) orientation, like the Muslim Brotherhood. The key focus of this paper is the transformation of the UAE and Qatar, respectively, though much further research can be done to understand the equally compelling processes at work in other GCC states in a time of upheaval and uncertainty.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, it addresses the nature of GCC collaboration and organization. Second, it explores how economic factors created a decade of booming growth within the GCC enabling different national level politics. The third and fourth sections address cases and styles of interventionism in the GCC, with special attention to the emerging practices of the UAE and Qatar, respectively. The fifth section discusses the build-up in military hardware in the region. The last section addresses the international and ideational forces that have encouraged the activism of emerging states of the GCC.

The key factors at the international level are both economic and security-centred. The increasing availability of advanced weaponry to Gulf Arab States from the United States and its Western European allies (as well as procurement rivals) is a balancing tool against the military strength of Iran. This is useful for the West, but also transformative socially and politically for the Arab Gulf States. The rhetoric of conflict between Iran and the Arab Gulf states has increased in hostility, notably from American military leaders. For example, General David Petraeus said in December 2009, 'The Emirati Air Force itself could take out the entire Iranian Air Force, I believe, given that it's got... somewhere around 70 Block 60 F16 fighters, which are better than the US F-16 fighters'.² This kind of language plays into the prestige factor, which Arab Gulf states seek, and to the US military goal of cementing alliances and customers for their arms products. Just over three years later, the US military made its largest sale of aircraft and missiles to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Israel, on the premise of coordinated defence against Iran.³ The US approaches the arms sales as a triangulation of Iran from the Gulf, a source of export revenue for its defence industry, and a realignment of relations with the Gulf that hinges less on the Israeli-Saudi-Egyptian balance, and more on the emerging powers. The result is not a traditional arms race between Iran and its Gulf neighbours, but rather a prestige race inside the Arab Gulf states to amass parallel security sectors, largely from the same source – the United States.

¹ For a more detailed analysis of the differences in domestic politics on the relationship with Iran and Iranian nationals in the UAE see: Karim Sadjadpour, *The Battle of Dubai: The United Arab Emirates and the US-Iran Cold War*, The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2011.

² Ynet News, 'US General: UAE's air force could take out Iran's', 18 December 2009, by Yitzhak Benhorin.

³ Craig Whitlock, 'Pentagon reaches deal on \$10 billion arms sale to Middle East allies', *The Washington Post*, 19 April 2013.

GCC IN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

The United Nations defines the GCC as a sub-regional group, which matters because Chapter VIII of the UN Charter relies heavily on regional groups as conflict mediators of first choice, before the Security Council is asked for its consideration. The GCC has in many ways usurped the power of the Arab League, the regional group responsible for the Gulf and the broader Middle Eastern and North African Arab states, as well as the preferred organization for regional conflict in international law. The GCC was a reactionary political organization designed to counter both the economic and growing political influence of Iran after the revolution in 1979. The founding charter was signed by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait in Abu Dhabi on 25 May 1981.⁴ Similar to the design of the European Union, the GCC has two core intergovernmental bodies, a Supreme Council (comprised of the six heads of state and convened once per year) and a Ministerial Council (comprised of six foreign ministers and convened four times per year). The Secretariat, based in Riyadh, coordinates and oversees the implementation of GCC policies. The GCC Charter includes three areas of coordination: economic and financial affairs; commerce, customs and communications; and culture and education. It does not mention coordination of security and foreign policy, though clearly this was an impetus for the formation of the body. This divide between intention and institutionalized authority is an intrinsic bipolarity of the organization.

The Arab League has been plagued with coordination problems for decades, but the GCC has also disappointed in its ability to coordinate policy and find common ground on issues of monetary policy, trade, security and social policy.⁵ In the early years of the GCC (and early independence of Gulf Arab states), Saudi Arabia and Oman served as two bookends of leadership within the sub-region. Shifts in oil and gas discovery and production, policies of economic liberalization and openness to foreign investment, and general movements of the global economy (oil shocks, trends in emerging market investment and the expanding apparatus of global banking) have spread the centres of economic power in the GCC away from Saudi Arabia and Oman to first, Kuwait and Bahrain, and later to Qatar and the UAE.

Currently, there is public debate on Qatar's ability and interest in challenging the historical leadership of Saudi Arabia within the GCC and the Middle East.⁶ Because of the sheer size of its domestic economy and oil export capacity, Saudi Arabia has been the powerhouse of the Gulf for decades. Though Saudi Arabia remains a religious pillar of the region and larger Muslim world, it is losing its grip on political and cultural leadership within the GCC. Its religious authority is intact, yet the cultural shift in favour of economic liberalization and the expatriate community that comes with it

⁴ For an English copy of the Charter, see: <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=1>

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Marco Pinfari, *Nothing but Failure? The Arab League and GCC as Mediators in Middle Eastern Conflicts*, Working Paper No. 45, Crisis States Working Papers, London School of Economics, March 2009.

⁶ See, for example, Robert Worth, 'Egypt is Arena for Influence of Arab Rivals,' *New York Times*, 10 July 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/10/world/middleeast/aid-to-egypt-from-saudis-and-emiratis-is-part-of-struggle-with-qatar-for-influence.html?hp>. The general argument presented in the press is of a divide between Qatar and Turkey on one side, being more comfortable bargaining with a rising Muslim Brotherhood in electoral politics, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other side, as states rejecting the democratization of the Arab world and the legitimacy of the Brotherhood in GCC state-society relations.

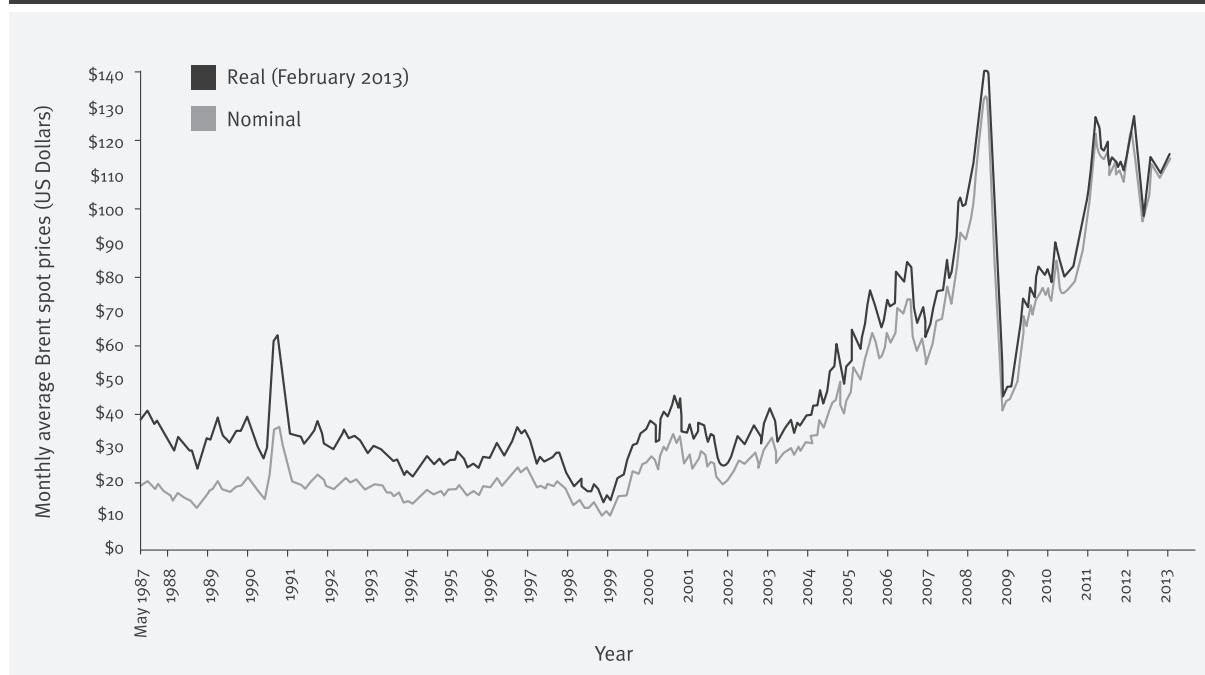
has long been accepted by other GCC states as beneficial to both Gulf nationals and the larger Middle East community. The smaller GCC states, most recently the UAE and Qatar, have embraced a hybrid economic and political strategy that is liberal in its economic openness to icons of global capitalism, yet controlled in its local ownership and state direction. The perceived Saudi-led hierarchy of monarchy and tribal ruling families of the Gulf is perhaps a relic of the 1970s and 1980s and performed out of ceremonial respect. A new Gulf, in which economic liberalization blends with Islamic tradition and tribal leadership, is emerging in Qatar and the UAE. (One could see the roots of this kind of hybrid liberalism in Kuwait's political liberalization and Bahrain's effort to build a global financial centre). The blending of economic liberalism, political authoritarianism and activist foreign policy is shaping a volatile political identity, underlining the multiple processes of state-building taking place.

ECONOMIC GROWTH, LIBERALIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION

This trajectory of economic liberalization highlights the temporal nature of GCC power and policy development. In a short period of time, since the mid-1970s, there have been three shifts in leadership in the sub-region. Saudi Arabia is the ideological father of the GCC with its early vision of nationhood along with a distinct political Islamism. Oman has served as a post-colonial remnant of the region, keeping ties with Britain and a nostalgic geopolitical connection to a larger physical area of influence from the Indian Ocean to East Africa and the Red Sea. The second generation, or shift in leadership moved to Kuwait and Bahrain, which in the 1980s emerged out of Saudi influence with their own versions of political and economic liberalization, with developing banking sectors and new models of political participation in the Arabian Gulf. The third generation and shift has been to the UAE and Qatar after 1995, when both countries experienced transformational shifts in leadership that included a political reorientation to the West (in exchange for military equipment and protection), along with financial liberalization and the seizing of energy markets.

Timing is essential here. The UAE and Qatar experienced political and economic transformations by the mid-2000s for three reasons. First, the emerging market trend in foreign investment in the mid-1990s spurred the liberalization of bank sectors and investments in infrastructure. Second, the passing of responsibilities from Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan in the late 1990s in the UAE⁷ and the overthrow of Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Thani in Qatar by his son Sheikh Hamad in 1995, allowed a new generation of leaders to emerge who were willing to increase government expenditure and engage more actively in foreign policy. Third, the commodities boom of the 2000s boosted GDP across the GCC and created a wave of wealth for the state. (See Chart 1: Brent Spot Oil Prices 1987-2013 and Chart 2: GCC GDP 1994-2008).

⁷ Sheikh Zayed al Nahyan passed away in 2004, and major investments in the UAE in the bank sector and energy sectors also occurred in this period, though not all were related to Zayed's death. The emergence of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum in Dubai as ruler in 2006 cemented the property and investment boom of Dubai. With Mohammed bin Rashid in Dubai and Khalifa bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi, a new generational era of growth, liberalization and security interests emerged in the UAE.

Chart 1: Brent Spot Oil Prices 1987-2013

Note: Conversion to February 2013 dollars uses US CPI for all urban consumers; Monthly average refers to January of mentioned year, unless stated otherwise

Sources: Energy Information Administration and Bureau of Labor Statistics

Chart 2: GCC GDP (in USD billions) 1994-2008

Year	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
1994	4.86	24.80	12.92	7.37	120.17	37.12
1995	5.85	26.56	13.80	8.14	127.81	42.74
1996	6.10	31.07	15.28	9.06	141.32	47.88
1997	6.35	30.03	15.84	11.30	146.49	50.25
1998	6.18	25.33	14.09	10.26	128.34	47.17
1999	6.62	29.66	15.61	12.20	139.38	51.86
2000	8.60	44.80	19.60	12.30	191.00	41.50
2001	10.10	29.30	19.60	15.10	232.00	54.00
2002	8.40	30.90	21.50	16.30	241.00	51.00
2003	9.80	34.20	22.40	17.20	242.00	53.00
2004	11.29	41.46	36.70	17.54	287.80	57.70
2005	13.01	48.00	38.09	19.49	310.20	63.67
2006	15.90	47.36	40.39	24.46	346.30	115.80
2007	18.02	55.91	44.53	26.37	366.20	129.50
2008	24.61	138.60	61.21	57.69	572.20	145.80

Source: M. Shafiqur Rahman, 'Variance Analysis of GDP for GCC Countries', *International Review of Business Research Papers*, Volume 6, Number 2, July 2010, pp. 253 -259, p. 255.

All of the GCC economies have been growing, and nearly all have benefited from boosts of foreign investment in the last decade. As Michael Herb has argued, the UAE quickly surpassed Kuwait in foreign investment and diversification of its economy (particularly in non-oil exports and re-exports) between the 1980s and 2000s. In 1980, Kuwaiti non-oil exports were 84 per cent of those of the UAE; by 2006, they were only at 5 per cent.⁸ Qatar's economic growth curve is steeper, though less diversified in its sources. However, foreign direct investment (FDI) is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the transformational shift in foreign policy and political will to engage in regional and international politics occurring in the UAE and Qatar. (See Chart 3 below). Saudi Arabia enjoys substantially higher levels of foreign direct investment (though limited to certain oil-related sectors) and Iran has very little foreign investment, yet can be inclined to intervene in the politics of its neighbours. The difference is an alignment of local, regional and international factors that have created an opening for smaller states like the UAE and Qatar to enter a regional political playing field previously reserved for Saudis, Israelis and Iranians. The timing of the massive creation of wealth of the 2000s coincided with a new generation of leadership in the UAE and Qatar and encouraged new statecraft to emerge. The first oil boom of the 1970s was too early for these small states to absorb institutionally and to project beyond their sub-regional base. The dynamics of the international political economy have favoured the generational shifts of leadership in the emerging power states (especially the UAE and Qatar) of the GCC.

In a recent article on the surge in foreign direct investment in the GCC between 2002 and 2010, legal scholar Jordan Toone questions how the cash infusions have affected the growth of individual GCC states, and how their institutional approaches to control and direct FDI generated different outcomes.⁹ The short answer is that the GCC has experienced a decade of enormous opportunity, one that may not occur again in the near future. How that financial opportunity is harnessed for political goals differs considerably by state.

Chart 3: Inward FDI Flows—Individual GCC Member States

Country	2002*	2010*	Percentage change
Bahrain	\$217	\$156	-28.11%
Kuwait	\$4	\$319	7875.00%
Oman	\$122	\$1,142	836.07%
Qatar	\$624	\$4,670	648.40%
KSA	\$453	\$28,105	6104.19%
UAE	\$95	\$5,500	5689.47%

*Measure: In millions of US dollars at 12 July 2012 prices and exchange rates.

Source: Cited in: Toone 2013. UN Conference on Trade & Dev. [UNCTAD], *Inward and Outward Foreign Direct Investment Flows, Annual, 1970–2011*, UNCTADSTAT (18 July 2012), <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=88>

⁸ Michael Herb (2009) 'A Nation of Bureaucrats: Political Participation and Economic Diversification in Kuwait and the UAE', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41, pp. 375–395.

⁹ Jordan Toone, 'Mirage in the Gulf?: Examining the Upsurge in FDI in the GCC and its Legal and Economic Implications for the MENA Region', *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 26, 2013 (forthcoming).

This shifting and evolving nature of GCC policy and political identity is a natural configuration of political and economic factors, and more importantly, of the process of state-building and constructing distinct national identities from a group of people who have some shared tribal affiliations; they also share long-standing memories of past slights, both economic and territorial. The population of GCC states is not solely Gulf Arab, either. Many scholars focus on the disproportion of expatriate workers to nationals in GCC states and the public policy problems this creates in private vs. public sector employment¹⁰, but few have studied the diverse origins of nationals. Bedouin, descendants of African slaves, Persians, and West Asians are all part of a melting pot of the Gulf. The performance and production of a single ethno-national identity has been a priority of GCC states since independence. The state-building project of Gulf Arab identity is a product of the Iranian revolution in 1979, as much as the two catapults of wealth, 1973 and then again after 2002, that have separated Gulf Arabs socially from their peers (and tribal affiliations) in the larger Levant and Middle East.¹¹ The evolution of the GCC as an organization has followed along these ideational and economic trajectories. At present, the two GCC member states that are less interventionist in outlook are Oman and Kuwait. This deserves some qualification (and each case deserves more detail than offered in this paper).

Following a tradition of Kuwaiti generosity (a foreign policy of gifting, rather than intervening¹²), Kuwait has entered into the financial reward intervention scheme in Egypt after the ouster of President Morsi in July 2013, along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹³ No one expects Kuwait to do more. There are two key reasons why Kuwait adopts a meeker foreign policy towards its neighbours. First, Kuwait has to balance a small but segmented domestic political arena. The presence of Muslim Brotherhood representatives in its Parliament means Kuwait cannot delegitimize the movement without risking serious domestic upheaval. The government is better off localizing its domestic opposition, rather than encouraging its internationalization. Second, Kuwait is in a predictable 'resource curse' economic situation. Its economy cannot absorb the foreign reserves it accumulates, as the government invests most of its oil export earnings abroad, leaving comparably little investment in infrastructure and education. More than 90% of Kuwaitis who work are employed by the state.¹⁴

¹⁰ See, for example, work by Ingo Forstenlechner and Emilie Rutledge which nicely provides data relating oil revenue and per capita expenditure on nationals to employment in the private and public sectors among nationals and expatriates across the GCC: Forstenlechner, I. and Rutledge, E. (2010), 'Unemployment in the Gulf: Time to Update the 'Social Contract'', *Middle East Policy*, 17: pp. 38–51.

¹¹ For a discussion of national identity emerging as a strategy to assert sovereignty in the Arab Gulf states, see earlier work by Michael Barnett, 'Sovereignty, nationalism, and regional order in the Arab state system', *International Organization*, (June 1995), Vol. 49: 03, pp. 479–510.

¹² For a general discussion of Arab financial aid, including Kuwaiti sources and motivations, see: Espen Villanger, (2007) 'Arab Foreign Aid: disbursement patterns, aid policies and motives', *Forum for Development Studies*. Vol. 34, Issue 2, pp. 223–256.

¹³ 'Kuwait pledges \$4billion in aid to Egypt', *Arabian Business*, 11 July 2013. <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwait-pledges-4bn-in-aid-egypt-508607.html>

¹⁴ Mohammad Ramadhan, Abdulhameed Hussain, Reem Al-Hajji, 'Limitations of Kuwait's Economy: An Absorptive Capacity Perspective', *Modern Economy*, (May 2013) Vol. 4, pp. 412–417. Ramadhan et al argue that, 'The economy depends heavily on oil exports, and specifically, oil revenues accounts for 50% of GDP, 95% of exports, and 90% of government income (GDP in 2010 was around 125 bil US\$)...It should be emphasized that the economy generated high rates of savings, mostly through the public sector, while investing surprisingly little in the domestic economy. Most of Kuwait's high savings are invested abroad, both in the form of FDI and as portfolio investment', (Ramadhan et al: 2013: 412).

Most of the non-oil economy of the past decade has been based on military and reconstruction services to Iraq (US contractors), which will likely decline substantially in the next decade. These factors leave Kuwait without a clear mandate for its regional and international economic and political objectives. Its key priorities are to avoid an uprising, to maintain social spending levels, to insulate its border physically and politically from instability in Iraq, and to secure its own energy needs at favourable pricing from neighbouring Qatar.¹⁵ It is in no position to cause tensions with its neighbours, or to embark on an activist pan-Arab agenda. Interestingly, Kuwaiti foreign policy is rather quiet towards neighbouring conflicts in Bahrain, Egypt or Syria, while Kuwaiti citizens more openly engage in funding both Sunni opposition and Assad regime fighters abroad.¹⁶ The reversal of citizen as activist, rather than state, is a telling feature of (relative to its GCC counterparts) liberal Kuwaiti politics. The state is quiet in an effort to downplay its own domestic sectarian divisions, yet the result of private intervention support is potentially as destabilizing.

Oman has actively sought a horde of military equipment that it is unlikely to use. As a proportion of GDP, Oman spent more than any of its GCC neighbours (even Saudi Arabia, except in 2008) on arms from 2000-2008.¹⁷ These are likely follow-on effects of their neighbours' policies, rather than concerted efforts at building an interventionist foreign policy on the scale of the emerging Qatari and Emirati initiatives. Oman is the least well known and in the most fragile position among its GCC peers. Some scholars refer to the future of Oman as 'grim', simply because the state has refused to institutionalize a process for succession. There is a deep centralization of decision-making that leaves an obvious vacuum of leadership when the current Sultan either passes away or leaves office by other means.¹⁸ Furthermore, Oman engages in good neighbour relations with Iran, even when unpopular with its GCC allies (such as during the Iran-Iraq war).¹⁹ It receives aid from GCC members, but exists at the fringes of regional politics.

¹⁵ On Kuwait's domestic energy crisis, see: Chris Stanton, 'Kuwait willing to pay a premium for gas imports', *The National*, 11 January 2009. <http://www.thenational.ae/business/energy/kuwait-willing-to-pay-a-premium-for-gas-imports>

¹⁶ See, for example, Ben Hubbard, 'Private Donors' Funds Add Wildcard to War in Syria', *New York Times*, 12 November 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/13/world/middleeast/private-donors-funds-add-wild-card-to-war-in-syria.html?_r=0. On the Kuwaiti foreign policy response to accusations of lax financial transfer regulations to groups of various sectarian confessional fighters, see: Kareem Shaheen, 'Officials Deny Funds Flow from Kuwait to Syria', *Daily Star*, 20 November 2013. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Nov-20/238370-officials-deny-funds-from-kuwait-flow-to-syria.ashx#axzz2lRjOSZvK>

¹⁷ Carina Solmirano and Pieter D. Wezeman, 'Military Spending and Arms Procurement in the Gulf States', SIPRI Fact Sheet, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2010.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Tetreault, Andrezej Kapiszewski, and Gwenn Okruhlik, 'Twenty-First-Century Politics in the Arab Gulf States', in Tetreault, et al, ed. (2011) *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Mehan Kamrava, 'The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution', *Orbis*, Vol. 56, Issue 1, pp. 96-104. Kamrava gives some evidence of Saudi aid to Oman and to Omani strategies towards Iran over the last 30 years. Also, see: Marc J. O'Reilly, 'Omanbalancing: Oman Confronts an Uncertain Future', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 70-84, for an earlier account of Omani foreign policy directed by the Sultan.

CASES AND STYLES OF INTERVENTIONISM BY GCC STATES

With increased prestige and the equipment of war, it is no surprise that Arab Gulf states have been ready to test their increased military capacity among weaker neighbours. There are four clear cases of GCC state interventionism and military activism. Since 2003, Saudi Arabia has engaged more directly in the domestic politics of Yemen, a divided country sharing tribal ties and a long porous border, and an insurgent movement attacking Saudi and Yemeni interests. These Saudi counter-operations were seen by Western allies, particularly the United States, as efforts in the ‘war on terror and Al-Qaeda’ and elicited little criticism from regional or international counterparts.²⁰

In 2011, Saudi Arabia led the Peninsula Shield Force, a GCC collaborative effort (and a milestone in Gulf military and foreign policy cooperation), to support the Khalifa regime in Bahrain. The GCC operation in Bahrain was Saudi-led, but included Emirati military personnel and equipment. The exact contribution of Qatari military forces in Bahrain is not known, but Qatari Army Colonel Abdullah Al Hajri has been quoted defending the action, ‘The duty of the Qatari troops participating in the Peninsula Shield force is to contribute towards restoring order and security [in Bahrain]... As a Qatari force we are receiving our orders from the head of the Peninsula Shield force. There are no Qatari forces outside the Peninsula Shield in Bahrain’.²¹ Since the Bahrain intervention, the Qataris have developed further an activist foreign policy that is elite-driven (perhaps singularly formulated by the last emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani).²²

The third example of GCC military activism and intervention is Libya in 2011, where Qatar took the lead in arming rebel groups inside Libya in violation of Security Council resolutions and then cemented international condemnation of the Gaddafi regime with Arab League and NATO support, and then Security Council resolution 1973, led by the United States. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE participated in military operations in Libya. The UAE also hosted Libyan dissidents and rebel groups during the revolution²³ and made substantial financial commitments and private sector investments in Libya before and after the fall of Gaddafi.

²⁰ Two recent books on the militarization of regional and US approaches to Yemen highlight the disregard in the international foreign policy community for the domestic politics of Yemen and the consequences of the militarization of borders and intervention based on concerns of exporting terrorism. On Yemen’s disintegration at the expense of local political organization, see Isa Blumi (2012) *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism*. New York: Routledge; also, on the question of the effects of international intervention and militarization of domestic conflict, see: Akbar S. Ahmed (2013) *Between the Thistle and the Drone: How America’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

²¹ ‘Qatar, other Gulf states deploy troops to Bahrain’, *World Tribune*, 21 March, 2011. http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2011/me_military0315_03_21.asp.

²² For a recent review of Qatari foreign policy, see Lina Khatib, ‘Qatar’s Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism’, *International Affairs* 89: 2 (2013) 417–431. Khatib contends that Qatar did not send forces into Bahrain as part of the Peninsula Shield GCC effort. However, media outlets report Qatari military commanders confirming their presence.

²³ In a recent visit to the UAE, Ali Zidan, the Prime Minister of Libya, told the UAE Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, ‘The UAE has provided us with military, security and humanitarian assistance when we needed it and we have come to sustain and develop it... we do not need financial support as we have revenues from the 1.6 million barrels a day we produce. What we are looking for from the UAE is their experience and lessons learnt in the security field’. Hadi Fornaji, *Saudi Gazette*, 30 March 2013.

The fourth example is occurring currently in Syria, where the groundwork of the first three interventions has cleared the way for an aggressive approach spear-headed by an emboldened Qatar, and most recently supported by the Friends of Syria group including the UAE and Saudi Arabia (along with Turkey, Jordan, US, UK and France).

THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT OF GCC INTERVENTIONISM

Saudi interventions of a more protective and paternalistic nature in the GCC are not new. Most arose from the period of state formation in the early 1970s when Great Britain withdrew from its Trucial States agreements along the Arabian littoral of the Gulf. Both the UAE and Qatar have had border disputes with Saudi Arabia since their independence in the 1970s. As Mohammad al Romaini argued in 1996, 'To begin with, almost every two Gulf countries have some form of border dispute between them'.²⁴ Saudi interventions in Yemen are likewise more paternalistic and protective (in the sense of defending borders and keeping tribal conflicts and militants out of Saudi territory).

The intervention in Bahrain's civil unrest by the GCC Peninsula Shield Force is perhaps the best example of traditional interventionism within the GCC. Saudi Arabia has played protector (and at times interloper) in Bahraini domestic affairs. In March 2011, the neighbour states intervened at the invitation of the Bahraini ruling family with armoured vehicles and troops. The shared perception among Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates is that Iran instigates, or at least benefits, from popular protest in Bahrain. However, there has been little hard evidence that the Iranian regime had direct involvement with the largely Shia uprising²⁵ (though mostly grounded on economic equality demands, rather than sectarian strife). In support of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia sent 1,200 troops and the UAE sent 500 police officers to help dispel and dismantle protest encampments.²⁶

The intervention in Bahrain in 2011 falls into this type of sub-regional paternalism, in which the Saudis felt a brotherly need to support the Bahraini ruling family as a duty. In fact, the Saudi mechanism of intervention has often been couched in a language of religious duty, of fealty, and of Arab Gulf (read: ruling family) stability. Saudi Arabia has not sought a pan-Arab political identity as Qatar and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani pursued during his rule from 1995-2013. There are many questions of how his fourth son and heir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, will interpret Qatar's security and national interests. The most likely scenario is a continuation of fostering a pan-Arab political identity for Qatar, while seizing opportunities for investment, military security and prestige that its Gulf neighbours either shy from or choose not to engage in.

²⁴ Muhammad al Romaini, 'The Gulf Monarchies: Testing Time', *The Middle East Quarterly*, December 1996, Volume 3, Number 4, pp. 45-51.

²⁵ See Toby Matthiesen's account of the manipulation of sectarian violence in Bahrain: Toby Matthiesen (2013) *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

²⁶ BBC News, 'Gulf states send forces to Bahrain following protests', 14 March 2011.

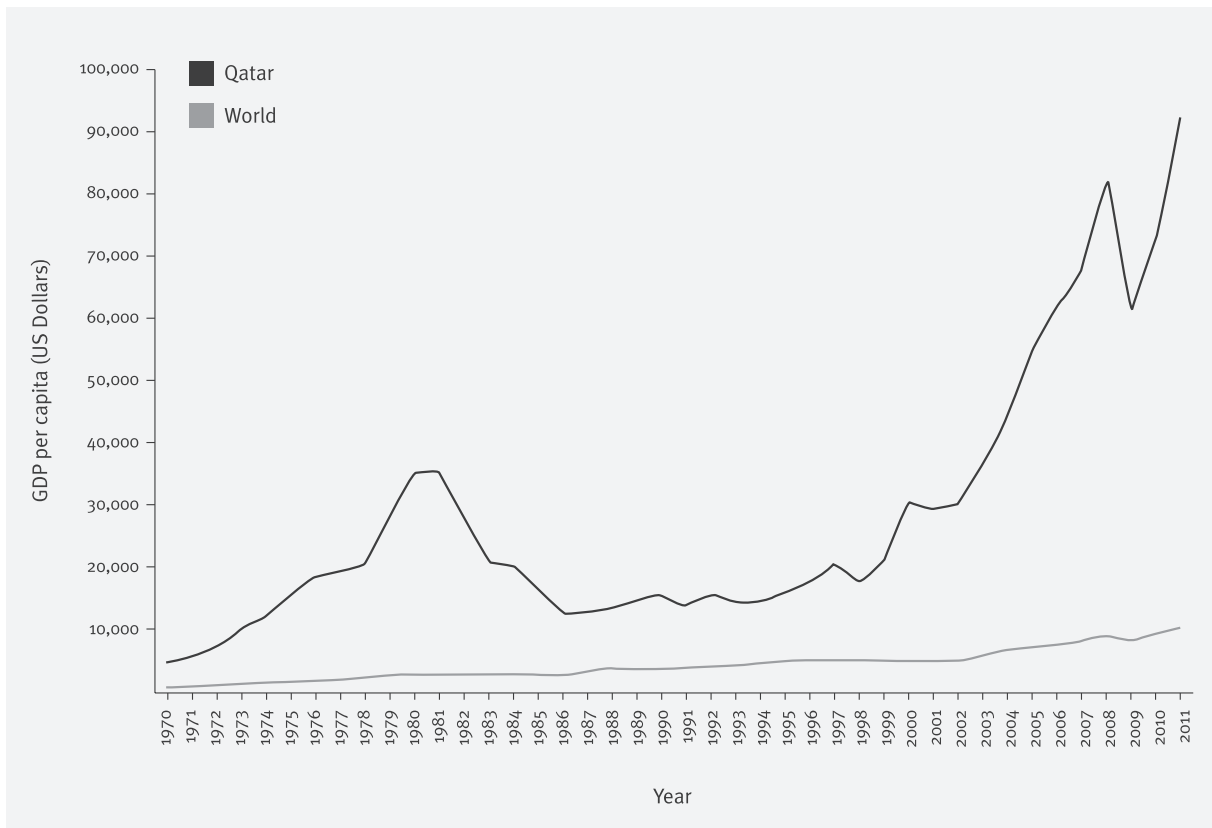
Qatar emerged out of a protective shadow of Saudi influence after the rise of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, who deposed his father in 1995. (His father had deposed a distant cousin, Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali al Thani in 1972, a year after independence from Britain. The Qatari al Thani dynasty is not without its own political insecurity). After 1996, we see the rapid ascent of Qatar as a regional power in both military and social spheres.²⁷ The new ruler negotiated and custom-built a \$1 billion US airforce base²⁸ as part of a strengthened alliance with the United States. In 2003, Qatar paid \$400 million for updates in the facilities of the American base at Al-Udeid. A separate camp, Al-Sayliyah, is reportedly the largest storage area for US military equipment in the region.²⁹ The opportunity arose because of concerns of a US military presence in neighbouring Saudi Arabia and Qatar and Sheikh Hamad quickly invited the Americans when their Saudi hosts became less keen. It was this quick decision-making and willingness to one-up a more powerful neighbour that has characterized Qatari foreign policy since 1996. Moreover, because the domestic politics of Qatar differ substantially from Saudi Arabia, the ruler made an easy decision to build a facility at a high cost, but without any domestic dissent. The Qatari population is small (approximately 250,000 citizens in a country of 2 million people), and is loyal and financially secure. The growth curve (GDP per capita) at 1996 was at a steep ascent and has accelerated to the present time. Whether the rapid accumulation of wealth by the state and then passed on to its citizens has directly suppressed dissent is a matter of debate, but at the least it has created a degree of social mobility that is dizzying and distracting from demands for political mobilization and participation. (See Chart 4).

²⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the transition in Qatar in 1995-96 and the break with Saudi hegemony (partly over a border dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia), see: Uzi Rabi, 'Qatar's Relations with Israel: Challenging Arab and Gulf Norms', *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 63, Number 3, Summer 2009. pp. 443-459

²⁸ Hugh Eakin, 'The Strange Power of Qatar', *New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2011.

²⁹ Allen Fromherz (2012) *Qatar: A Modern History*. New York: IB Tauris, p. 108.

Chart 4: GDP per capita Qatar, 1970-2011



Source: kushhirs.org

In fact, the scale and rapid pace of wealth creation has created new leverage in multiple arenas for Qatar (and the UAE, discussed below). The surge in oil prices from \$22 per barrel in 2002 to a high of \$147 per barrel in 2008 facilitated this growth. As Kristian Coates Ulrichsen³⁰ has argued, Qatar's early investment in its liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure allowed it to harness economic growth of more than 13% a year during the 2000s, making its gas revenue double that of its oil revenue at a targeted peak production in 2010 of 77 million tons per year. It is the LNG revenue that assures Qatar's continued wealth, much of it untapped as the North Field reserve is shared in the Gulf waters with Iran, which calls its reserve the South Pars. In 2005 and again in 2008, Qatar made a moratorium on exploration and production in the field until 2014.³¹ The Iranians have been unable to develop their share (3,700 square kilometres of the 9,700 total) because of infrastructure delays and sanctions.³² Some analysts view this field and the geopolitical implications for its export to Europe as one of the key rationales for Qatari foreign policy and intervention in Syria.³³ Syria would be on the route for LNG pipelines to the Mediterranean in both Iranian and Qatari export plans from the Gulf. The Iranian gas would travel through Iraq to Syria, while the Qatari gas would travel through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, then Syria and Turkey.

³⁰ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'Small States with a Big Role: Qatar and the UAE in the Wake of the Arab Spring', HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad Al-Sabah Publication Series, Durham University, UK, No. 3: October 2012.

³¹ Justin Dargin, 'Natural Gas Markets in the Middle East and North Africa', Oxford Institute of Energy Studies, June 2010.

³² Regan Doherty, 'Factbox: Qatar, Iran share world's biggest gas field', *Reuters*, 26 July 2010.

³³ Personal interview with energy analyst based in Qatar; see also, Nafeez Ahmed, 'Peak oil, climate change and pipeline geopolitics driving Syria conflict', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2013.

The relationship with the US is paradigmatic in that the Qatari leadership has made no effort to follow US diplomatic friendship cliques, as many Islamist groups of varied political agendas (Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, the Taliban and Hezbollah – at least until June 2013) have found Doha to be welcoming and unobtrusive in their political affairs.³⁴

The UAE has opted for a quieter approach to tensions within the Gulf and the broader uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. In every situation where Qatar has made a public intervention, the UAE has also engaged with financial assistance and often also militarily. However, the public relations mandate of the UAE is to keep a low regional profile, while amassing a strong military, maintaining good relationships with the US military without a formal base sponsorship, and benefiting from the wave of unrest in the region as Dubai and to some degree, Abu Dhabi, have received thousands of expatriate Arabs and their investments over the last three years. The quiet approach also covers any differences in federal approaches to relations with Iran, while promoting a global business-friendly national identity, rather than a pan-Arab political agenda. Further, the ruler of the UAE, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan does not seem to relish political pageantry, nor does he solicit an international stage or media attention, leaving foreign policy and its performance largely to the Crown Prince, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan.

Like Qatar, the UAE also has little financial incentive to provoke Iran. There are no (known) shared oil or gas reserves between Iran and the UAE in the Gulf; only disputed islands with no known resources and very small populations. However, trade between the UAE and Iran is important for re-export businesses, especially those in Dubai. In the cases of Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, the UAE has allowed rebel representatives to use the UAE as a place for diplomatic negotiations, fundraising (with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood) and media relations. The UAE government has been discreet in its support of rebel groups and their democratizing agendas (or at least upstaging of standing regimes). This approach is uniquely Emirati, grounded in its domestic politics. Emirati foreign policy is a product of a federal state system that is dominated by seven ruling families. Consensus, lack of public disagreement among the ruling families, and a respect for expatriate population sensitivities across the Emirates are essential. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain and Oman do not share these same domestic diversity concerns or tactics.

Therefore, UAE interventionism is less about the accumulation of new wealth and power, and more focused on preserving domestic stability and economic growth in a turbulent region. However, the UAE strategy seems to be long term, with interventions and investments focused on economic fungibility and messaging to allies and neighbours that the UAE values relationships. The messaging can be punitive. When the UAE is displeased with a foreign policy choice, a failed economic opportunity, or a negative response to a domestic policy goal, it reacts swiftly, often merging private sector and public sector goals. This streamlined authoritarian foreign policy gets results. For example, when UAE airlines tried to access the Canadian market a private sector dispute became a trade relations and foreign relations disaster.³⁵ The Canadian recalcitrance to allow landing rights in competition

³⁴ BBC News, 'How Qatar came to host the Taliban', 22 June 2013.

³⁵ See Awad Mustafa, 'UAE to Drop Visa Demand for Canadian Citizens', *The National*, 2 April 2013. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/politics/uae-to-drop-visa-demand-for-canadian-citizens>

with Canadian carriers earned a change in visa rules for its citizens visiting the UAE. Likewise, the UAE is able to merge domestic policy goals such as visa free travel to Europe with broader policy goals on human rights reporting, negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programme and arms transfers.³⁶ Negotiations become relationship-centred in that the UAE is comfortable granting rewards and punishments across a wide range of issues in ways that its counterparts (Western and regional) cannot afford to ignore.

The openness of the UAE to foreign investment hinges on its difference from its peers (namely, Riyadh and Doha as regional financial centres), and on its accessibility and relative safety during regional upheaval. This is a critical balance that may become more difficult for the UAE to sustain given Qatar's more aggressive interventionism. How rebel groups and Islamist movements perceive the Gulf Arab states will be essential to their stability in the coming months and years. These groups may not be as sensitive to the diversity among the Arab Gulf states.

In a pattern of carrot-stick diplomacy, GCC states have reacted with a range of incentives and sanctions towards Arab states experiencing unrest and political uprisings against authoritarian regimes. A report released by the International Monetary Fund in September 2012 said that Saudi Arabia pledged USD \$17.9 billion in aid to the MENA region between 2011 and 2012.³⁷ The kingdom promised Egypt \$4 billion, Bahrain and Oman \$5 billion, Yemen \$3.6 billion, and Jordan \$2.65 billion, but most of these pledges have yet to be delivered.³⁸ Likewise, the UAE has made a number of investment and aid commitments to Arab states undergoing transitions. In 2011, the UAE committed \$3 billion to Egypt³⁹ in infrastructure and small and medium business aid. Between January 2012 and 2013, UAE trade with Libya had increased by 300%, according to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce.⁴⁰ Major investments in airports, infrastructure (specifically the energy and refinery sectors) and private companies have fuelled a re-export business between Dubai and Libya and general interest in the still volatile country.⁴¹ The general approach is to provide aid and to create mutually beneficial investments, while also shoring up GCC national military capabilities to counter both foreign and domestic threats.

³⁶ See Caline Malek, 'Germany Renews Vow to Support Emiratis Visa Free Travel to Europe', *The National*, 13 November 2013. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/tourism/germany-renews-vow-to-support-emiratis-visa-free-travel-to-europe>

³⁷ IMF Country Report, 'Saudi Arabia 2012 Article IV Consultation', International Monetary Fund, September 2012, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12271.pdf>.

³⁸ For more analysis on the Saudi reaction to the Arab Spring, see: Ahmed Al Omran, 'Saudi Arabia: A new mobilization', in *What Does the Arab Gulf Think?* European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2013.

³⁹ Farah Halime, 'UAE's \$3bn aid package to Egypt for housing and small firms', *The National*, 6 July 2011.

⁴⁰ 'Dubai Private Sector Trade with Libya Soars', *Libya Business News*, 17 January 2013.

⁴¹ AMEInfo, 'UAE firm to invest in \$1.5bn in Libya,' 23 January 2013. <http://www.ameinfo.com/287651.html>

MILITARIZATION IN THE GCC

In the last ten to fifteen years, the GCC states have amassed an arsenal of sophisticated weaponry and now seem to be intent on putting their increased military capabilities to use. Saudi Arabia has been a major arms purchaser on international markets for years, but the surge in military equipment in the UAE is especially striking.⁴² The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports that between 2008 and 2012, 19 per cent of all major arms transfers to the Middle East went to the UAE, followed by Saudi Arabia (18 per cent), Turkey (17 per cent) and Iraq (10 per cent). In 2012 the UAE ordered 2 THAAD anti-ballistic missile systems and received the first components of 4 Patriot PAC-3 SAM systems ordered in 2008. In 2011 Saudi Arabia ordered an estimated 21 Patriot PAC-3 systems, and Kuwait ordered PAC-2 GEM-T missiles to upgrade its Patriot systems.⁴³ In 2012 Qatar announced plans to procure THAAD and Patriot PAC-3 systems, and Kuwait announced plans to procure Patriot PAC-3 systems. In 2009, the UAE was estimated to be the fourth largest arms importer in the world, though this status was largely due to a few major purchases in 2008-09. The arms purchases come with diplomatic and lobby efforts meant to gain prestige and secure the ability to sustain the militarization of the state security sector. For example, the UAE spent \$5.3 million in 2009 in advisory fees, according to the Sunlight Foundation, to lobby American officials for greater access to nuclear technology.⁴⁴ The material build-up and diplomatic effort are unprecedented.

The largest arms transfer the US has sold occurred this year, with a \$10 billion package sale (in separately negotiated deals, but publicized as a counter to Iranian power in the region) to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel. A study by the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, a division of the Library of Congress, said US weapons exports totalled \$66.3 billion in 2011, out of a global weapons market of \$85.3 billion. In contrast, Russia's arms exports stood at a distant second at \$4.8 billion in the same year. US arms exports constituted an 'extraordinary increase' in just one year over the \$21.4 billion in 2010 sales. The US exported weapons worth \$31 billion in 2009. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman were major buyers of US weapons at record levels last year.⁴⁵ We do not have complete data on military expenditure, particularly for Qatar and the UAE, but there is evidence of an upward trend in arms purchases since the early 2000s. We also know the most recent Saudi and Emirati purchases from the United States are massive investments in arms. (See Chart 5). The investments signal both a budgetary commitment and defence policy adjustment that will have effects for the next decade. The next decade is critical in terms of a realignment of American priorities in the region, a perception of a coming confrontation with Iran, and the fruition of a number of state-owned investment vehicles, in short, a time in which the projection of power from the Gulf Arab States could amplify considerably. The military expenditure in states like the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia is both precautionary and ambitious.

⁴² See, for example, an analysis of arms purchases through the 1990s by F. Gregory Gause III, 'Arms Supplies and Military Spending in the Gulf,' *Middle East Report*, Number 204, July-September 1997. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3013137>.

⁴³ Peter Holtom, Mark Bromely, Pieter Wezeman and Sieman Wezeman (2013) *Trends in International Arms Transfers*, 2012. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

⁴⁴ <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2011/02/01/the-arab-worlds-2010-lobbying-contacts/>

⁴⁵ Jim Wolf, 'US in \$3.5 billion arms sale to UAE amid Iran tensions,' *Reuters*, 31 December 2011.

Chart 5: Military Expenditure of the Gulf States, 2000-2009

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Bahrain	368	387	462	531	535	529	576	609	651	721
Iran	7409	8175	6148	7195	9109	11296	12233	10158	9174	...
Kuwait	4023	3954	4080	4396	4732	4580	4550	5109	4660	4589
Oman	2621	3049	3140	3303	3713	4476	4786	4849	4617	4003
Qatar	...	...	1588	1602	1476	1569	1657	2020	...	...
KSA	23523	25053	21995	22157	24632	29680	33809	38946	38223	39257
UAE	10940*	10575*	9725*	10201*	11016*	10254*	12098*	13052*	...	...

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/> SIPRI Factsheet (Figures in US\$m. 2008 prices and exchange rates)

... = unavailable data; *SIPRI estimate.

IDEATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CAUSES OF ARAB GULF STATE INTERVENTIONISM

As the anti-terror ideology has legitimated the use of force and targeted assassinations by Western regimes since 2003, likewise the Gulf Arab States have adopted an ideational and, at times, moral stance towards their interventions in the region. Consider, for example, the UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan's speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2013:

'We, therefore, call upon the international community to take all necessary measures to punish the Syrian regime for its massacres against its civilians. All of you must be aware of the frustration we feel and the majority of countries in the region feel regarding the disabling of the United Nations mechanisms from acting against the aggressive acts of the Syrian regime against its people. The failure to act by international organisations is directly responsible for the aggravating humanitarian tragedy we witness in Syria and for the threat against the Syrian State, community and people'.⁴⁶

In a similar vein, the most outspoken supporters of the moral obligation argument to oust Assad are the Saudi and Qatari leadership.⁴⁷ According to Jonathon Schanzer of *Foreign Policy*, Saudi King Abdullah has reportedly warned that the kingdom, 'will never abandon its religious and moral obligations towards what's happening (in Syria)'. The subtext is to counter the influence of Shia Iran and to deflect domestic critiques of the tribal ruling families by presenting an informed, 'righteous' foreign policy.

⁴⁶ See full text of Sheikh Abdullah's remarks at: <http://www.7daysindubai.com/Foreign-Minister-urges-international-community/story-19861667-detail/story.html>

⁴⁷ See Jonathon Schnanzer, 'Saudi Arabia is Arming the Syrian Opposition', *Foreign Policy*, 27 February 2012. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27/saudi_arabia_is_arming_the_syrian_opposition

In Libya, the Arab League legitimated the overthrow of Gaddafi as a regime that had lost 'sovereignty' because of its failure to protect its own citizens.⁴⁸ This is language from the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and a useful tool to authorize a no-fly zone over Libya. Intervention, or at least air protection, becomes a moral duty to avoid a humanitarian disaster. In March 2011, the Qataris took the regional lead in this case, with their Mirage fighter jets helping enforce the UN Security Council's mandated no-fly zone, as well as supplying weapons, training, Special Forces troops and operational assistance to the Libyan rebels.⁴⁹ The UAE provided up to 12 fighter jets and logistical and material support, as well as diplomatic hosting of the international Contact Group and Libyan tribal representatives and Transitional Council members. Both the UAE and Qatar had investments at stake in Libya. In December 2010 the UAE agreed to a near \$3 billion joint investment fund just three months before the collapse of the Gaddafi regime.

The conflict in Syria has elicited the most strident opposition on moral grounds from GCC states, with the Saudis and Qataris offering weapons and financial support of the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime. This conflict may be a tipping point in Middle East diplomacy and intervention among Arab states. There have been reports since February 2012 of the Saudis sending weapons on an ad hoc basis to the Syrian opposition. The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal called it a 'duty' to arm to the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime as early as March 2012.⁵⁰ Saudi clerics have openly called for jihad in Syria. The Assad regime has countered with threats against GCC citizens and interests, prompting a travel warning by GCC states to citizens in Lebanon in May 2012. This travel warning was an acknowledgment of the spreading conflict and of the potential targeting of Gulf nationals for their states' foreign policies, certainly a first in pan-Arab relations.

The new balancing within the sub-regional security complex could be destabilizing for the larger region, particularly as the GCC states have regularly disagreed on a number of foreign policy issues. The presence of US military personnel and bases is a central theme. The UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait have generally been more conciliatory to US security interests and cooperation, while Saudi Arabia has (perhaps for domestic consumption reasons) been more publicly critical. In the region, GCC states have disagreed on how to engage Palestinian statehood negotiations and related conflicts (the Gaza flotilla crisis, for example), some welcoming Hamas (such as Qatar) and others hesitant. Likewise, Iranian relations within the GCC vary and fluctuate by moment and issue area. Qatar has generally been more open in its diplomatic ties, while the UAE (primarily motivated by Abu Dhabi, rather than Dubai and Northern Emirates interests) and Bahrain are regularly more aggressive in their rhetoric. The flare-up of territorial claims of Iran in the UAE islands dispute is yet another example of some varied policy responses by GCC members.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Diaa Hadid, 'Arab League Asks UN for Libya No Fly Zone', *Huffington Post*, 12 March 2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/12/arab-league-asks-un-for-libya-no-fly-zone_n_834975.html

⁴⁹ See Lina Khatib, 'Qatari Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism', *International Affairs*, Vol. 89: Number 2 (2013) pp. 417-431.

⁵⁰ Reuters, 'Saudi Foreign Min: Arming Syrian Rebels 'a duty'', *Chicago Tribune*, 31 March 2012. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-03-31/business/sns-rt-syriasaudiurgentl6e8evo7y-20120331_1_syrian-opposition-saud-al-faisal-arming-syria; also see: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/31/204429.html>

⁵¹ For a recent edited volume addressing the contradictions of GCC and US/European/NATO cooperation, see: Riccardo Alcaro and Andrea Dessì, eds. (2013) *The Uneasy Balance: Potential and Challenges of the West's Relations with the Gulf States*. Rome: Edizione Nuova Cultura.

Liberalization and economic coordination are often indicators of a government's economic competency, in the normative framework of global capitalism. The GCC has not been able to demonstrate economic cooperation at the level of monetary union (Though Europe is no longer a striking example of success). The GCC monetary union attempt has stalled because of disagreement over where a shared central bank might be located (First agreed to go to the UAE, the Saudis scrapped the idea and the Emiratis then promptly left the proposed union in May 2009). The record for GCC cooperation is not stellar. One of the most important tests of this regional diplomatic relationship, and the statecraft of its members, will be the decision to enforce sanctions against Hezbollah, announced in early July 2013 at a GCC foreign ministers' meeting in Jeddah.⁵² The ability of GCC central banks to share information on suspected Lebanese militants and their supporters is questionable. Moreover, the coordination of security sectors and intelligence sectors will provide either an opportunity for American and European Union cooperation with the sub-regional group, or open avenues for mistrust between the GCC security agencies.

As the GCC members grow into more powerful economic and military states, their sub-regional relations and tensions will impact their ability to engage larger crises in the Middle East and North Africa. The new willingness to intervene militarily and to spend resources on the development and aid of new, post-revolution states in the region could have serious consequences in the shape of new governments and the ability of these neighbour states to recover economically.

Qatar's intervention in Libya is one key example. According to Hugh Eakin, Qatar also gave USD \$400 million to the rebels, helped them to sell Libyan oil out of Benghazi, and to set up a TV station in Doha.⁵³ Qatar extended its financial support to weapons and manpower support as well. There are reports that Qatar armed the rebels and set up training camps for them in Benghazi and in the Nafusa Mountains west of Tripoli, while its own special forces also engaged in the offensive on the capital.

'In the past, many Arab leaders didn't even want to talk to me,' the Qatari emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, told the *Financial Times* in an interview last year.⁵⁴ The tides have turned, but there remains a great deal of insecurity surrounding the Qatari foreign policy with the new rule of Sheikh Tamin bin Hamad al Thani from June 2013.⁵⁵ Because foreign policy has been so centralized in Qatar⁵⁶, there is no window to discern how it might shift again, particularly at such a critical time in the region, when so many resources from Qatar have been dedicated in the last two years to aiding rebel groups in both Libya and Syria.

Qatari institutions had invested heavily in Syria, with a \$5bn joint holding company set up in 2008 to develop infrastructure like power stations, as well as investments in real estate. The Qatari emir was at first interested in gaining a foothold in Syria through friendly relations with Assad, courting him

⁵² Ghazanfar Ali Khan, 'GCC Vows to Rein In Hezbollah', *Arab News*, 7 July 2013. <http://www.arabnews.com/news/457110>

⁵³ Eakin, 'The Strange Power of Qatar', *New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2011.

⁵⁴ *Financial Times*, 24 October 2010.

⁵⁵ Rod Nordland, 'New Hope for Democracy in a Dynastic Land', *New York Times*, 25 June 2013.

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis, see Jill Crystal's work in which she has argued that political power lacks institutionalization in Qatar, including: Jill Crystal, 'Coalitions in oil monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar', *Comparative Politics*, (July 1989), pp. 427-43.

while the US and the West had frozen diplomatic relations.⁵⁷ Between 2009 and 2011 this relationship cooled, after Saudi Arabia made the political (and religious) decision to call for the ousting of Assad, Qatar then began to actively fund military rebel groups. The *Financial Times* estimates Qatar has spent anywhere from USD \$1 billion to \$3 billion in Syria on arms transfers in the past two years.

The economics of the new interventionism is particularly volatile as it hinges on a number of larger developments in international political economy. First, there has been a major dislocation of the defence industries of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council towards export-oriented arms production, rather than domestic armament. The Middle East and the GCC especially are the largest purchasers of arms in the world.

Second, the nature of wars and the impact of localized, ‘civil’ wars are different than the ideological and proxy wars of the Cold War before 1990. Since the 1990s, there are fewer conflicts between states and more violent conflicts within states, usually with heavy civilian casualties. We can see the Arab Spring as a continuation of the so-called ethnic wars of the 1990s, and again the causes are not sectarian or religious (as they were not in the former Soviet satellites, either) but about state provisions for welfare, and social inequality among groups with institutionalized state privileges. The increase in violence in just the last five years, however, is startling, considering we have yet to emerge from the tragedy of civilians caught in the Iraqi invasion and civil war a decade ago.

Third, the normative framework for military intervention on humanitarian grounds has changed significantly since the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was approved as a UN policy guideline by the General Assembly in 2005. Not legally binding, but serving as a framework for preventive action and accountability for the rebuilding of states affected by civil war, genocide or state failure, the doctrine serves to push the international community to intervene on the side of citizens rather than states in a humanitarian crisis. At the outset of the debate on the policy, one concern was focused on the more powerful states that might abuse the policy for their own ends.⁵⁸ The NATO intervention in Libya was the first case in which a broad coalition of regional powers (Arab League, with Qatar as impetus) used the doctrine as justification for toppling a government (not a failed state) that may have had intentions to harm civilians or civilian militias.

If anything, the status of the civil war refugee, the citizen of a failed state or post-conflict, revolution state has deteriorated since the advent of R2P. The human-centred approach is caught in a hyper-militarized notion and practice of conflict prevention and humanitarian intervention policy frameworks.⁵⁹ Military interventions now have legal and normative bases for their humanitarian efforts. The problem is that military intervention and humanitarian intervention are not the same. Private humanitarian efforts cannot act without bias when contracted by a military actor, and civilians and warring parties are not able to judge who is to help and who is to harm.

⁵⁷ Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding-Smith, ‘How Qatar seized control of the Syrian revolution’, *Financial Times*, 17 May 2013. See also Anders Gulbrandsen (2010) *Bridging the Gulf: Qatari Business Diplomacy and Conflict Mediation*, MA Thesis, Georgetown University. <http://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/552827>

⁵⁸ Louis Charbonneau, ‘Saviors or conquerors? UN mulls ‘responsibility to protect’’, *Reuters*, 24 July 2009. See comments by former Nicaraguan President Miguel D’Escoto against the R2P policy as a tool of powerful US and Western interests.

⁵⁹ Sarah Lischer, ‘Military Intervention and the Humanitarian Force Multiplier’, *Global Governance* 13 (2007), 99–118.

Libya was quickly forgotten, but Syria is a troubling case of emerging military interventionism with a strong religious and moral normative backing for many of the ‘humanitarians’ emerging on the conflict zone, heavily armed and financed by Arab Gulf states. The stakes could not be higher and the local, regional and international factors allowing such intervention adventures have created a perfect storm of lack of accountability and very little visibility for how the interventions will be concluded.

CONCLUSION

In closing, the emergence of wealthy, militarily strong, and politically motivated interventionist states from the Arab Gulf is a critical realignment of power and responsibility in international politics. Whether the Arab Gulf states are a regional group or sub-regional group in international norms becomes moot when their individual and collective interventions reward violence and replace regimes. What remains to be seen is how these states will transform their tools of statecraft. The differences between individual interests at the local level of ruling families, national interests in the development of institutionalized foreign policies, and regional policy collaboration are wide. A striking example is the recent decision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to reject its election to a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council in October 2013.⁶⁰ The official rationale was the lack of Security Council coordination in Syria, yet the Saudi decision works to diminish a regional presence in the international body, while allowing Saudi Arabia to avoid direct policy confrontations and substantial engagement with its American ally on the Council. It also avoids public scrutiny, or at least discussion within the Security Council, of Saudi’s continued unilateral engagement (armament and exportation of fighters) in Syria. In terms of statecraft and regional policy coordination, the Gulf Arab states are escalating a trend in bilateral engagement and militarization, with little support or encouragement from Western powers to delegate to global governance. This atomization of security policy within the Gulf Arab states can lead to competing foreign policy aims and increased violence by proxies in the wider region.

⁶⁰ Robert Worth, ‘Saudi Arabia Rejects U.N. Security Council Seat in Protest Move’, *The New York Times*, 18 October 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/19/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-rejects-security-council-seat.html?ref=middleeast>

FORTHCOMING PAPERS

The New Intellectuals in Iran: Trends in Contemporary Conscious Music

Dr Malihe Maghazei

Iran possesses a large youth population which has adopted critical and diverse attitudes towards the social and cultural establishment. A new cohort of intellectuals have expressed a belief in pluralism, political freedom, gender equality and cultural openness. This paper, the first in a series of three, examines how music is used as an expression of these trends.

Climate Change in the Jordan River Basin

Dr Michael Mason

This paper presents the findings of the research project led by Dr Mason, in collaboration with Birzeit University, addressing climate vulnerable rural communities within the national territories of the watershed of the Jordan River (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory) which is perhaps the most physically and politically stressed river basin in the world, critically applying a human security approach. The aim of the research is to develop improved policy responses for climate risk management within the Jordan River Basin through a better understanding of the linkages between climate change, adaptation and human security.

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