



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 1

A Peace Process for the Gulf: International Initiatives and Gulf Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

The Middle East is today in a state of unprecedented turbulence. The two principal Islamic giants of the region – Saudi Arabia and Iran – are locked intense competition. The ongoing struggle has strategic, doctrinal and political ramifications. While the divide between them primarily stems from strategic concerns, it is being shaped in

strident sectarian terms. This has split the region in a visceral manner, perhaps not seen in this intensity since the early days of Islam. The competition has been a major contributor to two wars in the region - in Syria and in Yemen. These have led to the deaths of over half-a-million people, the destruction of cities and societies, and serious humanitarian crises that threaten the lives of millions of people, without either side being able to claim full victory.

The conflicts Syria and Yemen, and the intense Saudi-Iranian rivalry, have drawn in other countries, each of which has been seeking to shape a new role for itself within the region. At the regional level, Turkey and Israel are deeply involved. At the global level, Russia and the US are now major players in the ongoing regional confrontations. The emerging rivalries portend further uncertainties in the regional scenario. The Trump presidency, for example, is deepening regional divisions by adopting a pro-active, even aggressive, posture against Iran, while some backing for Saudi Arabia. While other powers may not be so overtly divisive as this, their policies can also be problematic for the region.

With the intensifying vituperative rhetoric, and the vast expenditure on expanded military arsenals, an armed conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran has become a distinct possibility. The danger is enhanced by the fact that neither country has so far taken measures to re-set their relations on a basis of confidence-building and engagement. Nor have extra-regional powers taken any initiatives aimed at such an objective.

These inter-state rivalries and conflicts are occurring within a regional framework which tends to stoke instability rather than restore stable relations. Two major regional faultlines are impinging negatively on prospects for stability in the area. They are:

1. The assertion of Kurdish aspirations for independence, and the resistance to this. This threatens to overturn regional geopolitics, and
2. The fierce challenge to regimes mounted by trans-national forces (mainly the Al Qaeda and the Islamic State), and the resistance of established governments to this. Although both of the main Islamist groups have been subdued militarily, their ideology and their cadres remain undefeated. They are still capable of inflicting harm upon state order in West Asia and Africa, and upon soft targets in Europe and the US.

The impact of these faultlines is deepened by three critical characteristics of the regional system:

- a. **Regional institutions are no longer effective.** Both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council are increasingly reflecting the fissures among regional players and have become largely inert and non-functional

- b. Domestic aspirations for reform are very strong, and are not being satisfied.** This dissatisfaction comes largely from the youth, who are seeking a fresh social contract so as to move away from the patriarchal and patronage-based polities currently in existence. Even when economic and social reforms are introduced, no significant changes in the political system are pursued.
- c. Economic stresses are impinging critically on large parts of the population.** This stems in part from the precipitate fall in oil prices, but also from the failure of governments to grapple with changes in the geology, technology, economics and geopolitics of global energy. Aggravating this are the ever-growing inequalities between rich and poor, and high levels of corruption which distort economic planning and outcomes.

With the active political and military involvement of Gulf states in competition/conflict across the Middle East, the security scenario in the Gulf is now seamlessly interlinked with developments in the wider region. It is clear, therefore, that the key to regional stability and peace in the Gulf (and perhaps the wider Middle East) is the **building of confidence** between the two principal Gulf states - Saudi Arabia and Iran - and the promotion of dialogue between them to address matters of mutual concern.

In the long term, the achievement of peaceful relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia needs to lead on to institutional pan-Gulf structures to handle the security of the area – a Gulf cooperative security arrangement. The latter will require the active involvement and engagement of all the Middle Eastern regional states and external powers and bodies with an interest in the region’s security.

The Gulf security scenario has **significant implications for the interests** - political, energy, economic and logistical - of most of the major global powers, and also of some middle-sized powers. Yet whereas the United States and some Western countries have been actively involved with Gulf security issues, others have not; despite having long-standing political and economic ties with the region they have remained “fence-sitters” on political/security issues. This is not surprising since, till recently, the US effectively acted as the hegemonic power in the region, giving little or no space to other potential role players.

Now, however, the situation is changing. On the one hand, the US is showing lessened enthusiasm for maintaining an all-encompassing security role in the region while, conversely, the level of trust which the US enjoys in the region has declined – both under President Obama and more so under President Trump. On the other hand, major European and Asian powers are becoming increasingly cognisant of the potential they have to pursue diplomatic/political/strategic roles in the Gulf, as also of the risks to their interests if insecurity spreads further. Most of these latter countries, moreover, are interested primarily in security outcomes achieved through

agreement and peaceful resolution of conflicts rather than through military imposition.

Description and Rationale

- 1. Objectives and scope:** The workshop will offer a unique opportunity for Gulf scholars from different backgrounds to reflect on and discuss among themselves the pursuit of stability and peace in a deeply divided and contentious landscape.

The directors of the workshop have considerable experience of Gulf affairs. Three of the four directors of this workshop have together directed three GRM workshops in the past, which have ventured into new areas of Gulf studies such as ties with BRICS, the Indian Ocean, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, while the “adviser” has not only been a participant in many of these workshops but has also participated in some ongoing peace-related initiatives.

- 2. Suggested topics for papers:** While we would welcome submissions on all topics relevant to our overall theme, we will seek to ensure that we have a reasonable coverage in the following fields:

- a. Conflict resolution theory, and its application to Gulf competition/conflict*

- The relevance of theory?
- Comparative international experience: CSCE/OSCE; ASEAN etc
- Logistical connectivity and energy sharing as a means of promoting peace
- Cooperative security arrangements as a means and outcome of conflict resolution
- The relevance of Common Markets and economic integration
- Regional confidence-building and cooperative security

- b. Problems/issues capable of aggravating regional divisions in the Gulf region and which require resolution within any peace initiative*

- Security fears
- External interests
- Energy interests, especially as related to shared resources
- Minority groupings with cross-national links
- Radical Islamist movements
- Religious/sectarian differences

- c. Proposals and Frameworks for Gulf Peace Initiatives, Already on the Table*

- National: European initiatives; Asian initiatives; US initiatives
- Institutional (international organisations): the United Nations, the Islamic Cooperation Organisation, the Arab League
- Institutional (non-government bodies/groupings): peace groups, academic and non-official diplomatic groupings, religious bodies, interest groups etc.

d. New Proposals for Gulf Peace Initiatives

- Proposals which workshop participants wish to put forward, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of a wider grouping
- Proposals for particular countries or institutions/organisations to take initiatives
- Possibilities for Gulf countries to take initiatives in seeking cooperation in de-radicalisation, anti-terrorism and marine security, creating formal or informal institutions for this
- Possible cross-national initiatives (e.g. Russia/China/India)
- Feasibility of a “Marshall Plan” for regional peace and security in the Gulf.

e. Tangential Issues Needing Clarification/Consideration/Resolution

- Turkey’s role in Gulf and Middle East security
- Egypt’s role in Gulf and Middle East security
- Satisfying Kurdish aspirations in a regional security framework
- US-Iran confrontation and possible cooperation
- Possibilities of accommodating the Muslim Brotherhood in a regional peace paradigm
- Links with Israel/Palestine issues

Anticipated Participants

The workshop is intended attract both senior Gulf scholars, younger researchers and hopefully some practitioners in the field of Gulf conflict resolution. We expect them all to bring to the discussion out-of-the-box ideas to address this challenging topic.

It is important that the workshop reflects as wide a range of opinions and perspectives as possible. Participation, therefore, will be encouraged from all the major institutional and governmental groupings which are intent on conflict resolution in the Gulf area, and all the main geographical areas whose interests are significantly affected by security issues in the Gulf.

Workshop Director Profiles

Prof. Tim Niblock is Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of Exeter. He is also currently Visiting Professor at Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, and Joint Editor-in-Chief of the *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*. He has held the position of Vice-President of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies, and Vice-President of the British Society for Middle East Studies. He was the founding Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, and previously served at the University of Khartoum, the University of Reading, and the University of Durham.

Among his published books are: *The Gulf States, Asia and the Indian Ocean: Ensuring the Security of the Sea Lanes* (edited with Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun, 2018); *Conflict Resolution and Creation of a Security Community in the Gulf Region* (edited with Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun); *The Arab States of the Gulf and BRICS: New Strategic Partnerships in Politics and Economics* (edited with Degang Sun and Alejandra Galindo); *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region* (edited, with Yang Guang, 2014); *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century. The Local to Global Transformation* (edited, with Monica Malik, 2013), *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (2007), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (2006), 'Pariah States' and *Sanctions in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya and Sudan* (2001), *Class and Power in Sudan* (1987), *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (edited, 1982), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (edited, 1981), and *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (edited, 1980).

Prof. Degang Sun is Professor and Deputy Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China. He was an academic visitor to the Middle East Centre, Oxford University, and Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013). He is currently a visiting scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University (September 2018-September 2019). His research interest is China and the Middle East. His most recent works are: *Quasi-alliance Diplomacy in Theory and Practice: An Empirical Studies of the Relations between Great Powers and the Middle East* (Beijing: World Affairs, 2012); "China's Response to the Revolts in the Arab World: A Case of Pragmatic Diplomacy," (*Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2014, with Professor Yahia Zoubir); and "China's Economic Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries: Challenges Ahead?" (*Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.24, No.95, 2015, with Prof. Yahia Zoubir).

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad Talmiz Ahmad joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1974. Early in his career, he was posted in a number of West Asian countries such as Kuwait, Iraq and Yemen and later, between 1987-90, he was Consul General in Jeddah. He also held positions in the Indian missions in New York, London and Pretoria. He was head of the Gulf and Hajj Division in the Ministry of External Affairs in 1998-2000.

He served as Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia twice (2000-03; 2010-11); Oman (2003-04), and the UAE (2007-10). He was also Additional Secretary for International

Cooperation in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in 2004-06, and Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi, in 2006-07. In July 2011, the Saudi Government conferred on him the King Abdul Aziz Medal First Class for his contribution to the promotion of Indo – Saudi relations.

After retirement from foreign service in 2011, he worked in the corporate sector in Dubai for four years. He is now a full-time academic and holds the Ram Sathe Chair in International Studies, Symbiosis International University, Pune.

He has published three books: *Reform in the Arab World: External Influences and Regional Debates* (2005), *Children of Abraham at War: The Clash of Messianic Militarisms* (2010) and *The Islamist Challenge in West Asia: Doctrinal and Political Competitions after the Arab Spring* (2013). Many of his papers have been published in academic journals and in books. He writes regularly in the Indian and West Asian media and lectures on political Islam, the politics of West Asia and the Indian Ocean, and energy security issues.

Selected readings

It is hoped that contributors will take note of the series of Gerlach publications which have emerged from earlier Gulf Research Meetings on Gulf relations with the external world (especially those with Asian and African countries). The three convenors have contributed substantively to these works. The publications are:

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

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

Gupta, R, Abubaker Bagader, Talmiz Ahmad, and N.Janardhan (eds), *A New Gulf Security Architecture: Prospects and Challenges for an Asian Role*. Berlin: Gerlach (2014).

Hook, S, and Tim Niblock (eds), *The United States and the Gulf*. Berlin: Gerlach (2015).

Abusharaf, R.M., and Dale Eickelman (eds), *Africa and the Gulf Region: Blurred Boundaries and Shifting Ties*. Berlin: Gerlach, 2015.

Niblock, T, with Sun Degang and Alejandra Galindo (eds), *The Arab States of the Gulf and BRICS*. Berlin: Gerlach, 2016.

Niblock, T, with Talmiz Ahmad and Sun Degang (eds), *Conflict Resolution and Creation of a Security Community in the Gulf*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2017.

Tim Niblock, with Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun (Eds.), *The Gulf States and the Indian Ocean: Ensuring the Security of the Sea Lanes*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2018

Fawaz A Gerges, *The New middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014

Marc Lynch, “New Arab World Order”, Carnegie, 16 August 2018, at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/16/new-arab-world-order-pub-77056>

Kamran Mehrava, *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf*, Cornell University Press, 2018

Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Hegemony*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2018

Patrick Milton, Michael Axworthy and Brendan Simms, *Towards a Westphalia for the Middle East*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2018

Bruno Macaes, *Belt and Road: the Sinews of Chinese Power*, London: Hurst, 2018



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Paper Presenter Abstracts:

Searching for Peace amid Contesting Visions of Regional Order in the Middle East

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Abstract:

It can be argued that the Middle East today has no regional order in any positive sense. It is the least ordered or governed regional subsystem in the world, as many of its countries are suffering from civil wars, that invited the intervention of the International and regional powers, in their attempt to enhance their influence.

One of the main fault lines in the region is the Saudi – Iranian rivalry that has been evident in the Middle East since the unfolding of the Arab spring in 2011. However, such regional conflict could be dated back to the 1979 Iranian revolution, when Tehran tried, without much success to export its revolution to neighboring countries.

Nonetheless, the Arab spring provided Tehran with another opportunity to extend their regional influence to the conflict-ridden countries, especially Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, in addition to consolidating its influence over Iraq and Lebanon.

Iran's main arm in the region is represented in its alliance with armed non-state actors, as evident in Hezbollah in Lebanon, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq, and Houthis in Yemen. These actors signaled their allegiance to Tehran, and expressed their intention to threaten the security of Arab Gulf states, through directing threats to disrupt maritime security in the red sea, near Bab-al Mandeb strait.

Today, there is no agreement on the rules of the game that should govern the interactions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective allies, as both sides have been implicated in proxy wars in the aforementioned countries.

These development infuriated Riyadh, who started, in cooperation with UAE and Egypt among others to curtail Iran's regional influence, especially in Yemen and Syria. Saudi Arabia established the Arab coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen in order to undermine the Houthis influence over Yemen. Riyadh is also investigating the possibility of establishing a cooperative framework among countries of the red sea to thwart the Iranian influence there.

U.S. and Russia, on the other hand, is influencing this rivalry through their attempt to pursue their interests. The American president Donald Trump tried to establish an American-led security alliance called "Middle East Security alliance" (MESA), with the primary aim of curtailing Tehran's influence, while re-imposing sanction in an attempt to force it to stop its interventionist policies in the region.

Russia sought to mediate unsuccessfully between Riyadh and Tehran at a request of the former. In addition, Moscow competes with the Iranians over influence in Syria, a development that is considered positive by Saudi Arabia and its allies, who are trying to restore their diplomatic relationships with the Syrian government in attempt to undermine the Iranian influence.

However, the attempt to settle some regional conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen may pave the way to the formulation of a new rules and norms for a regional order that will govern the interactions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and decrease the intensity of the regional conflict.

The article will try to utilize "regional order" as a theoretical framework in order to investigate how regional order stabilize in the aftermath of systematic wars, and what strategies are applied by regional countries to restore order. The article will seek to investigate the evolution of the Arab regional system from historical perspective.

The paper will then attempt to analyze the prospects of regional stability through investigating the various security alliances in the region, especially the Saudi and the

Iranian-led alliances, and its impact on the stability. In addition, the role of the US and Russia will be assessed especially their impact on the Iranian influence in the region. Finally, the ongoing peace negotiations in the Syrian, Iraq and Lebanon will be studied to figure out, whether they will contribute to a larger understanding between Riyadh and Tehran or not.

Shaping a Peace Process for the Gulf: An Indian Initiative to Realise the Ideas of Westphalia

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Abstract :

Three distinguished scholars, Patrick Milton, Michael Axworthy and Brendan Simms, have published a book titled: Towards a Westphalia for the Middle East. This book brings together the broad conclusions that emerged from several rounds of discussions among Western and West Asian policy-makers and academics who analysed the various aspects of the Thirty Years' War in Europe in the early 17th century and the Peace of Westphalia finalised in 1648 and examined in what ways the peace of Westphalia could offer ideas and guidance on the promotion of security and peace amid the various contentions that have gripped West Asia over the last eight years.

The authors have noted significant “parallels and analogies” in the nature and impulses of the principal contenders, their strategic and security concerns, and the role of religion in encouraging conflict, both as a motivating force and as an instrument to facilitate mobilisation of domestic and regional support. More importantly, the authors contend that the Peace of Westphalia provides the diplomatic tools for peace-making and specific agreements that could serve as models to address the conflicts in West Asia.

This paper analyses the security scenario across West Asia, shaped principally by the competitive strategic interests of the two regional powers – Iran and Saudi Arabia – and examines how their contentions have come to be defined in faith-based sectarian terms. It also discusses the interests and roles of other regional and extra-regional nations in the cauldron of West Asian confrontations which have already led to two major “proxy” wars—in Syria and Yemen – and are threatening to evolve into a region-wide conflagration.

This paper then discusses how the ideas thrown up by Westphalia could be implemented through a peace process shaped and led by India at the head of a modern-day “Third Party” of like-minded nations -- China, Japan and Korea -- which have an abiding interest in West Asian peace and stability.

Is a Westphalian peace arrangement possible in the Persian Gulf?: The social construct behind war and peace

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Abstract:

The present-day international system is based on “nation-states” (or rather territorial states), therefore, war and peace are interpreted also in this context. Central to this is the Westphalian system which established state sovereignty. Following the Second World War the new world order was built on the principle that the international community does not acknowledge the seizure of territory by force. Consequently, international organizations, mainly the United Nations Organization, was authorized to use its power to ensure peace and new instruments have been developed to meet this end, among them peace-building, peace-keeping and even peace enforcement.

Yet, war and peace have been among the most ancient phenomena of mankind and human societies, and thus are central to every culture/civilization and religion. In the Middle East and the Persian Gulf these concepts are deduced both from the pre-Islamic traditions and from the relevant suras of the Qur’an as well as the prophetic traditions, the hadith.

The challenge of non-state actors (be they international organizations, multinational companies or terrorist groups) have not yet eroded the states’ capacity to codify international law, make treaties, etc. However, they have started to change the meaning of both war and peace, either when a non-state actor (Hezbollah) may draws states into war (2006 Lebanon War) or when the Islamic State based on the umma concept declared its caliphate across borders.

The Saudi-Iranian competition in the Persian Gulf is often interpreted as a Sunni-Shia clash, therefore, the Westphalian comparison may even apply in the sense that the Thirty Years’ War closed a period of clashes based on religious differences. However, the religious authority both sides attributes to itself when presenting their universal(ist) Islamic ideology, makes it ever more difficult to mediate at least some kind of reconciliation in this realm. The other dimension of their competition, the

Realpolitik struggle for power, is at the moment considered to provide the structure not only for state competition, but eventual reconciliation as well.

Yet, the concept and tradition of statehood on the two sides of the Persian Gulf are very much different: while Iran looks back on thousands of years of statehood, which even the Islamic revolution has not questioned, statehood, especially when territorily defined, is a new phenomenon on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf. This is reflected in the still visible duality of state and tribe (family). If the state becomes the new tribe as in some other Arab countries – is still to be seen.

Consequently, any settlement in the struggle for power between Saudi Arabia and Iran will have to be constructed in this dual context.

Turkey's Role in Middle East and Gulf Security

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Abstract:

Turkey has been an active player of the Middle East politics since the 2000s. The literature emphasizes two major reasons for this activism: the first line of thought puts at its corner the coming to power of the AKP and the policies drawn by Ahmet Davutoğlu and looks at the ideological factors that has deepened the relations in time. The Islamist worldview of the AKP leaders, their links with the Muslim world and how they felt at home in the Muslim world when compared with Europe was emphasized at this point. The second explanation underlined that rather than ideological reasons, interests drew AKP closer to the region. Within these interests geopolitical rivalry in the aftermath of the Iraq War is emphasized. Turkey trying to fill the power vacuum that emerged in the region is shown as the major driver of Turkey's policy. In this thinking, at a time when Iranian power was on the rise and the collapse of the Iraqi state empowered the Kurdish groups, Turkey was "compelled" to play a more active role in the region. Also, within this context Turkey's economic interests are presented. How the Turkish economy needed new markets and the need to access the Gulf markets as a new venue for Turkish goods is often emphasized. In a previous article, I have underlined the economic logic of Turkey's activism in the region. Although none of these reasons are exclusive of each other, and complement rather than conflict with each other, there is no doubt that Turkey became one of the major players of the Middle East during the 2000s. Ahmet Davutoğlu's 'zero-problems with neighbors' policy is often repeated as the motto of Turkish policy and Syria's emergence as a model for Turkey's relations with other regional countries – changing from cooperation to integration – can be underlined.

In this paper I aim to demonstrate how the growing relations in the first decade of the 2000s have deteriorated in the second decade -with the onset of the Arab Uprisings. I will try to understand the reasons behind this deterioration from the Turkish side. In line with the analysis of the previous decade, I will underline the ideological and geopolitical reasons of the deterioration and will argue that the pro-Muslim Brotherhood stance of the AKP government led to Turkey's isolation in the region and the re-emergence of "the Kurdish threat" from Turkey's south, from Syria has been leading to the securitization of its foreign policy in the region. Although Turkish leaders have called this isolation a valuable one by introducing the concept of "precious loneliness", prospects of Turkey's activism and its role of the previous decade seems to be long history.

Iranian Rouhani Administration's Peace Initiative to GCC: Effects and Restrictions

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Abstract:

Since the Islamic Revolution, there have been two tendencies of ideology and pragmatism in Iran's foreign policy. But pragmatism has prevailed in Iran's policy towards GCC. The GCC itself was the result of the Gulf Arab monarchies against the Iranian threat for their own security during the Iran-Iraq war. After Iran-Iraq war, Iranian presidents sought reconciliation with GCC countries in order to improve their geopolitical isolation, and tried to develop economic relations with GCC and build an independent Gulf collective security system. Since taking office, Rouhani has repeatedly proposed peace initiatives to his Gulf neighbors, promoted high-level visits and pragmatic cooperation. Rouhani's peace initiative has received the positive responses from some small GCC countries, but relations with Saudi Arabia have failed to materially improve and even broke off. There are some structural contradictions between Iran and GCC countries, such as the difference of identity, geopolitical competition and the hindrance of the United States. In Rouhani era, Iran's increasing power after signing of the nuclear deal has broken the balance of Gulf geopolitics. Rouhani's administration has continued an aggressive regional policy, intensifying its proxy wars with Saudi. Iran's ballistic missile program has raised GCC countries' concerns about regional security. And Trump's extreme pressure policy against Iran has blocked some GCC countries from improving relations with Iran. These factors have made the efforts of Rouhani's administration to seek reconciliation with GCC into an ideal.

Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Vital Element in the Peace Process for the Gulf

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Abstract:

Countering violent extremism is a relatively new concept in international discourse which came into existence in the years following the 9/11 attacks. The Global War on Terror (GWOT) that gained momentum under the Bush administration placed a very heavy emphasis on extrajudicial and military actions to destroy the top Al-Qaeda leadership suspected of violent actions. Widely known as the “decapitation” strategy, it became the cornerstone of Bush’s National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT) which at best could be described as short-sighted and simplistic as it completely overlooked the importance of exploring the underlying causes and the myriad aspects of violent extremism. While the decapitation strategy served to destroy top leaders like Osama Bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi amongst others, it did little to terminate their ideology which continued to thrive in different parts of the globe. The ambition of the upper echelons of the Al-Qaeda leadership to spread their ideology all across the globe has, to a very large extent, been successful in the Middle East, Northern and Central Africa, South and South-East Asia and Europe who have all experienced the consequences of violent extremism. According to reports, the proliferation of violent extremist discourse and actions has seen an upswing since 2003 when the Al-Qaeda “absorbed or merged” with ten terrorist organizations and established its presence in 19 countries.

The aim of the Bush government to dismantle terror outfits overseas so that “...we do not have to face them in the United States” failed miserably. The attacks in Madrid on the commuter train in 2004 which killed more than 193 people, followed by the London bombings in 2005, the 2008 Mumbai hotel siege, the 2011 Norway attacks, 2015 Paris attacks, and 2016 Belgium attacks bear testimony to the failure to contain the spread of violent extremism across the globe. It is against this backdrop that in 2005 the war on terror witnessed a paradigm shift wherein the focus moved from the elimination of senior leaders of Al-Qaeda to putting in place a strategy against violent extremism which could tackle the growing support for “radical Islam” in the Muslim world. The strategy took into account the ideological aspect and recognized that it was no longer a battle for territory but one of ideas. Furthermore, it took cognizance of the complex dynamics of the interplay between culture and identity and how those were being harnessed to build a critical mass of supporters across the world. Europe and particularly the Middle East were identified as the frontline for this strategy against violent extremism. In keeping with this belief, the Bush administration as well as the subsequent Obama administration was convinced

that violent extremism could be checked if the Middle East was reshaped on the Western Democratic model and the “forward strategy of freedom” was implemented in the region. It was believed that the countries of the Middle East were well springs of violent extremism due to their prevalent unstable political and economic systems. The result of the implementation of the “forward strategy of freedom” resulted in ushering in instability and placed heavy responsibility on the United States to prop weak governments in certain countries of the region. The situation inadvertently also created a fertile environment for the rapid proliferation of the Islamic State, an organization that has earned global notoriety for violent extremism which has been publicly exhibited through use of modern technology .

While the steady decline and “defeat” of the Islamic State (IS) after the fall of Raqqa in 2017 is an accepted reality, experts across the world believe that it is far from finished and that, the organization could reinvent itself in different and perhaps, more lethal ways and proportions than in its previous avatar. While territory may have been lost by the organization, its ideology lives on and will most likely, proliferate across the globe and particularly thrive in countries which are home to vulnerable populations. The challenge therefore that lies before countries is to counter and ultimately prevent the spread of violent ideology rather than merely adopt approaches that are military and security-based. Unless a more holistic approach which involves the active participation of a variety of stakeholders including NGOs, faith-based organizations and academia is adopted, countering violent extremism will not be complete.

Countries that are most at risk are those in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, in South and South-East Asia as well as in Europe. The situation in the first two regions is particularly vulnerable as they have countries which offer a propitious ground for the proliferation of “IS 2.0”. These are countries where inter-state rivalries loom large; where socio-economic development remains restricted to only a small percentage of the population and where more than half the world’s population under the age of 30 years resides.

It is against this rationale that this paper makes a case for Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (C/PVE) through education- including the formal, informal and non-formal levels, as one of the possible means for promoting and fostering a peace process in the Gulf.

Countries of the Gulf tout the advantage of a “youth bulge”, with almost half its population under the age of 30 years. This “youth bulge” is a double edged weapon. On the one hand, this large pool of human capital, if harnessed intelligently, could be a demographic dividend while on the other, it could prove to be demographic disaster if timely and plausible solutions are not provided. This paper will explore ways in which C/PVE through education could be achieved by including a variety of stakeholders from faith based organizations, corporate sector, media and academia, to name a few, in the formulation of appropriate educational responses which take into account issues like culture, identity and religiosity. These re-education programs

should form an integral part of countering-extremist policies, thereby providing the much needed psycho-social angle to an otherwise hard security driven discourse. The paper will begin by examining the definition of the term violent extremism. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the push and pull factors for violent extremist actions will be discussed to set the stage to determine that there is no one set of situations that drives people to violent extremism but a combination of situations and factors. The following section will examine violent extremism in the context of the Gulf, the section thereafter will discuss the “youth bulge” of the MENA, but more specifically of the GCC countries; the section that follows will examine the expectations of the generational cohort under the age of 25 years which constitutes the “youth bulge”. And finally, the last section will look at how education could be used as a tool to counter violent extremism thereby contributing to the peace process in the Gulf.

Blue Bridges – Blue Peace. The Gulf Eco Gateway. Transboundary Planning for Peace and Biodiversity Conservation

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Abstract:

This paper will examine the concept of Blue Bridges and Blue Peace – that is - regenerative projects that co-create restorative scenarios for the future across maritime borders, taking ecosystems, bio-cultural and socio-ecological approaches to envision maritime Transboundary Protected Areas (TBPAs), that include collaboration over endangered species, conflict and cooperation over resources, and cultural technological innovations that seek to transcend the barriers and conflict. We will look at the geopolitical context of these boundary landscapes, in the midst of the world’s largest producers of oil and natural gas, as well as considering the natural and environmental collaborations that could emerge in these border conditions.

Conceivably, the role of these borders could go beyond being places for ecological observation and preservation, they could become benchmarks for ecological cooperation across political boundaries which can secure ecological and human relations between Qatar and neighboring boundaries.

In the Persian Gulf region, territorial and boundary disputes, military conflicts and recent struggle between GCC states, more specifically at coastal areas has hindered sustainability efforts to implement coastal management program. A recent escalation which includes an embargo/blockade of Qatar by its neighboring countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain has aggregated the situation further. Despite the increasing gross domestic progress (GDP) in the past few decades, confining the Gulf states political stresses need to be translated by authorities, planners, environmental scientists and coastal management into actionable praxis of smart development that prioritizes coastal development, preservation and ecological protection.

Nature based solutions to preserving ecosystems and biodiversity must go beyond national and political borders, to embrace ecosystem and watershed based zoning, that takes into account water systems and species habitats. Additionally, zoning and planning should not stop at the water's edge, or at the coastal boundary, but extend into the sea and the waters. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report, presented in May 2019 in Paris stressed that nature is declining globally at unprecedented rates, and species extinctions is accelerating.

Initially, dispute in the Gulf region was influenced primarily by the introduction of the modern state by European powers and a boundary competition to define ownership of oil deposits. The thirty-six-year dispute between Qatar and Bahrain over Hawar islands ended in 2001. Today, Hawar islands belong to Bahrain where plans to develop a friendship bridge that links Qatar to the islands is embedded in a new regional rail network intended to increase mobility and exchange between the two countries.

Unfortunately, due to the current crisis between Qatar and its neighbors, resource flows between borders were compromised. The interruption includes land, sea and air borders between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Unique to the Hawar islands location are thousands of endangered migrating birds that play an important role in regional marine ecologies along the east coast of Qatar where it is situated. Another zone of territorial dispute is Khor al Adaid. Located in an area of mobile dunes south of the Qatari peninsula along the border with Saudi Arabia, the area contains a unique number of terrestrial and marine environments and a large tidal embankment marking it as a global ecological importance

Both Khor al Adaid and Hawar islands border areas have been nominated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and offer possibility in becoming well-designed and managed cross-border ecological cooperation zones, guaranteeing lasting human and

ecological security between Qatar and its neighboring countries. These projects can stimulate cross-border scientific research, stakeholder engagement and ecological Master Planning through a network of scientists and nature conservationists on both sides of the border. Additionally, this network is further enabled by the support of international NGOs such as UNESCO, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Worth mentioning examples of transboundary areas in conflict or contested zones which have reached a level of cross border influence and citizen-scientist collaborations, despite an ongoing conflict, crisis or embargo are the Korean DMZ, the Cyprus Green Line Buffer Zone, the Jordan River Valley.

The premise of this paper references and builds on contemporary and emerging concepts and frameworks for conflict resolution and peace building, such as Blue Peace, Peace Parks and Transboundary Protected Areas, Bottom's up and Multi-Track Diplomacy and scientific and cultural diplomacy.

In conclusion, the paper presents a Gulf Eco Gateway Master Plan – a project undertaken with Master's students at Qatar University in Urban Planning and Design, and which proposes a project for the Hawar Islands-Al Reem Transboundary Protected Biosphere Reserve. It builds on the proposed Bahrain Friendship bridge, which would connect and link the high-speed rail network that was being planned for the Gulf Countries. It proposes and explores linking Al Reem Biosphere reserve as a UNESCO site, with the Hawar Island Protected Area.

Referring to the opportunity cross boundary areas offer, it is examined that the conservation and protection of ecological systems and species cannot be isolated from geographical contexts. The holistic approach this project examines an imperative opportunity to continue working on collaborative visions despite the current crisis. Research projects on borders and transboundary cooperation between scientists, nature conservationists, and artists, must continue to envision these projects, and to prepare the ground for when the conditions are ripe for implementation.

While the current Gulf crisis precludes this type of transboundary planning with between Qatar and its neighbours, ecological and nature based planning, based on species and habitat conservation, must go beyond borders to be effective. It can be envisioned as a positive contribution to a solution.

The manufactured clash: Role of Arab state-media in conflict resolution in the Gulf

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on the role of Arab state-media in conflict resolution in the Gulf. Drawing from the media theory coined by Noam Chomsky, the paper highlights the agenda-setting model of media and analyzing the various meanings of ‘conflict’. To further contextualize this theoretical discourse, the case-study of Press TV (Iran) and Al Arabiya (Saudi Arabia) have been chosen for the time-frame from January – May 2019.

Firstly, the paper would describe the genesis of the respective media channels, their soft-power approach and how they categorically exacerbate the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. The political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the rivalry are mediated, often manufactured to impact the cognitive psychology of the natives, thereby creating acrimony, sectarianism and hatred. Secondly, in the above mentioned time-frame, the news pieces, features, documentaries and interviews published/broadcasted would be studied through the research methodology of content analysis.

After understanding the psychological imperative of manufacturing news to further escalate conflict, the works of the above mentioned scholars would be contextualized to gauge the intention and impact of both the media channels. Towards the end, drawing from the analytical discourse of how media plays a significant role in conflict-resolution would be understood. The frame of reference for this dichotomy (of both perpetrating and resolving conflict) is a serious discourse that needs to be utilized to chalk-out practical solutions. The paper would also highlight the respective challenges faced by the media itself, due to it being the government’s mouthpiece and lacking democratization within itself, which further escalates the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry.

Towards the end, the paper would focus on the necessary limitations faced due to the functioning of the deep-state in both Iran and Saudi Arabia, which is difficult to academically scrutinize due to the lack of empirical and descriptive sources. Highlighting this challenge, the paper would further explain how media’s role becomes more essential. Questioning the normative fallacy in understanding the media’s role in conflict-resolution, the paper fills the research gap currently prevalent in this discourse to endow further political suggestions, solutions and resolutions in the Gulf politics.

Passive Mediation in Persian Gulf Conflicts: Analysis of Pakistan's Peace Initiatives

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Abstract:

Pakistan is a highly significant country in Persian Gulf due to its geostrategic location, large number of workforce, the only Muslim country of nuclear capability, and centuries' old religious and cultural affinity, etc. It is the second largest security guarantor of Saudi Arabia after the US. Pakistan shares border with Iran. Islamabad's policy has been driven by religious bonds, economic interests and political relationships on issues affecting the Muslim world. Pakistan has not only helped the Arab countries in institution building during their formative years, but it has also provided them support during security crisis in the 20th century. Since 2001, the regional dynamics changed Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan vis a vis Iran. Resultantly, new foreign policy parameters emerged related to Pakistan's role in the Persian Gulf conflicts. In 2015, Pakistan decided to stay neutral in Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, which was a highly unexpected decision for the Saudi ruling elite. In 2016, Pakistan used passive mediation efforts to defuse tensions between the two Persian Gulf rivals, i.e., Saudi Arabia and Iran. Later, Pakistan opted neutrality in Qatar's diplomatic crisis in 2017. This study hypothesizes that due to changing parameters of Pakistan's foreign policy since 2001, the country has been able to maintain significant leverage over all Persian Gulf countries. Resultantly, it has successfully prevented conflict escalation through 'passive mediation' between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2016, and between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 2017. Recently, Pakistan has also convinced Saudi Arabia to mend its position on Yemen conflict and offered its mediation between the two warring parties, i.e., Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Houthis, which was welcomed by Iran. In this backdrop, the study will be focusing on questions, what are Pakistan's peace initiatives in Persian Gulf conflicts? How these initiatives helped to de-escalate tensions and averted armed conflicts? And what are Pakistan's limitations in its mediation efforts during these conflicts?

Russia's Peace Initiatives in the MENA Region: Evaluation and Prospects

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Abstract:

Russia's recent thundering "return" to the Middle East is first and foremost an obvious result of the effective use of hard power rather than the tools of soft power such as economics or diplomacy, which played important but secondary roles. The most visible symbol of this return is the establishment of two permanent, sovereign Russian military bases in Syria. Indeed, Moscow has extensive experience in employing hard power to protect its interests, but political, financial and security costs and risks of its application are aplenty, which will dictate Russia's more cautious policy on this matter in the future.

Having gained a military foothold in the region, Russia now seeks to augment its influence in the MENA region further, and increasingly through the use of soft power, particularly diplomatic initiatives. The Astana-Sochi process is the format that Russia has molded for this purpose. At the core of it lies the stipulation that there are no unwelcome "rogue" parties to conflict (apart from the terrorists), that it is unacceptable to delegitimize (and thus exclude from negotiations) sides, especially sovereign governments, unilaterally, as the West has attempted in relation to Syria and Iran, and that all interested parties should be able to attend and be heard out. The Astana-Sochi process has failed on certain accounts, for instance to include Kurdish militias, which was due to the ambiguous definition of terrorism in international politics, yet it has eclipsed the more exclusionary Geneva track of negotiations.

There are numerous signs that Russia plans to use this or similar conflict resolution models to attempt to raise its international profile, particularly in the MENA region. Recently Russia organized talks hosted by Sudan between conflicting parties from the Central Africa Republic; Moscow has also demonstrated much interest in becoming the guarantor of an agreement between Damascus and Kurdish militias; in Libya, while Moscow still supports the UN-led process, it is frequented by leaders of various Libyan factions and even independent presidential candidates, indicating that Russia may be preparing ground for its own initiative should the UN-led one reach an impasse. Amid these developments, Yemen's Houthis have also asked Russia to mediate the conflict. While Moscow has so far been reluctant to get involved in Yemen as much as in the aforementioned cases, primarily due to the nature of the Yemeni civil war, which is accompanied by a massive foreign intervention with the implicit support of the West, it is watching the conflict closely, sending humanitarian aid and regularly meeting representatives of warring sides and

responsible UN officials, gradually becoming one of the key foreign players in the country. Recently, Russia has also become involved in the peace process for Afghanistan, hosting talks in Moscow between the Taliban and prominent Afghan politicians.

The study will focus, first, on the analysis of the Astana-Sochi process for Syria, its theoretical foundations and practical implementations, evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, and then explore its applicability in the MENA region, including the Gulf area, considering both objective features of the format and more subjective implications of wider Russian involvement in the region against the backdrop of rising tensions between Moscow and the West.

The Chinese Perspectives and Wisdom On Conflict Resolution in the Gulf Area

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Abstract:

The Middle East has been long time in a state of intranquil turbulence, frequent conflicts, poor governance and inadequate development. As the hinterland of the Middle East, the Gulf area generally remains relatively stable though, it's inevitably caught in various disputes with the fact that almost all the conflicts in the Middle East are closely related to this region. It is a major task for both the international community and the regional countries to consider about how to effectively resolve those conflicts, to promote regional governance, and eventually achieve long-term stability of the Gulf region and the entire Middle East. China, with its high-holding banner of peace, development, cooperation and win-win, actively participates in reforming the global governance system, devotes to building a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future of mankind, strives to "be the peace-builder, the development-promoter, the industrialization-assistant, the stability-supporter and the amity-partner" of the Middle East. While adhering to the practical concept of "peace, innovation, guidance, governance, and harmony", China achieves extensive cooperation with Middle Eastern countries, actively promotes peace talks and conflicts resolution. Which then, carries the concept of peaceful development and mutual benefits into practice, helps the Middle East to embark on a new road of comprehensive rejuvenation, meanwhile, demonstrates the oriental wisdom: "connection via communication" and "amity via interaction". The paper analyzes the Chinese perspectives and wisdom in resolving regional conflicts from the aspects of history, politics, development, security and civilization, then draws the conclusion that the unique Chinese perspectives and wisdom can provide the Gulf

region and the entire Middle East with vital resources and valuable experience in conflicts resolving and governance improving.

Bahraini 2011 Uprising, and the Regime's Securitization of Sectarianism as a Survival Mechanism

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Abstract:

The revolution in Bahrain was equally, if not even more, distressing for the powers-that-be than in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen. Bahrain is located in a region that is one of the largest oil fields in the world and also hosts a base for the US Navy's fifth fleet, since the 1990s. According to many experts on the Gulf, what happens in Bahrain determines the fates of other monarchies in the region. Hence, the fall of the Al-Khalifa monarchy would affect the other Gulf States and jeopardise the apparent invincibility enjoyed by the Western-backed Arab monarchies (Davidson, C. 2017; p.266-272). In the case of Bahrain, it is assumed by many that it was a sectarian struggle for power between the Shi'i majority and the Sunni rulers (Bronner, E. 2011), (Mabon, S. 2012), (Kirkpatrick, D. 2014). This premise holds some truth, however such an understanding only provides a superficial view that merely touches upon the surface of the problem. The Bahraini uprising of 2011 was very complex and was affected by multiple factors and players that determined its outcome. Such players vary from the actors within the regime; the power play between the Prime Minister vs. Al-Khawalids against the king and the crown prince, to other regional power dynamics change. An internal power struggle and division within the royal family affected the regime's approaches in dealing with the opposition, eventually leading to regional military intervention (Justin J. Gengler, 2013). This chapter argues that the Bahraini uprising of 2011 was not a sectarian struggle for power, but rather it was a result of realpolitik policies. This view also helps to understand the regional military intervention and the regime's crackdown on the opposition and demonstrators. However, I am not claiming that sectarian differences did not play a role in the struggle. Indeed, sectarian identity was securitized by the regime to demobilize the masses, delegitimize the opposition, and to legalize the regional military intervention. Nevertheless, there was a turning point in the uprising on 13th March 2011. Prior to that date, the Bahraini regime and the opposition both sought a political solution to problems within the governmental system. Such an approach was reflected in the Crown Prince's national dialogue initiative that was supported and encouraged by the regional powers. Crucially, the negotiation period that spanned from the beginning of the uprising on 14th February until 3rd March demonstrates that the struggle was not sectarian in its essence. Moreover, this paper will also show how historical description and national discourse has been used to establish a

sectarian securitization framework for a threat that was not necessarily sectarian. This is elaborated upon through an explanation of the power play that ensued within the regime and the space securitization of the Pearl Roundabout within the kingdom. The paper also outlines and examines the economic conditions of the kingdom before 2011, with low living standards, poverty and unemployment all contributing to people's frustration with the regime that would later trigger the uprising. It then will analyse the daily discourse and the regime's interaction with the demonstrators during the uprising and its attempts to maintain a flawed system. The royal family power-play rejected the possibility of any political solution to the uprising and by 13th March 2011 the security solution became de facto rule as a result of clashes of economic and security interests. The paper will end by focusing on the regime's usage of language, images, and space to securitize the uprising, and the regime's attempts to erase any symbols of resistance from the national narrative through the instrumentalization of the sectarian framework. A discourse that has tried- could be argue that it succeeded- to present the uprising as a sectarian struggle, which need to be 'omitted' from the citizens memories because of its sectarian 'nature'.

The Imperative of Conflict Resolutions in Yemen: The Roles of External Powers

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Abstract:

The uprising that swept across the Arab region in the spring of 2011 was rooted in people's demands and aspirations for a free democracy, employment opportunity and moreover an urge for a dignity. Amidst the transition in the Arab world following the upheaval, four major trends were identified in the region: Non-violent transition like in Tunisia and Egypt; greater degree of constitutional regime and political freedom such as in Morocco and Jordan; unabated violence in Syria, Yemen and Libya and counter-revolutionary move of the GCC regimes. The deep-rooted divide has split the region in a manner which was never witnessed in the recent past and conflict in Syria and Yemen in particular has drawn two aspirant hegemons (Iran and Saudi Arabia) and each is trying to carving out the region of their own strategic imagination. The uprising in Yemen very soon morphed into a tribal, regional and ideological war and multiple primordial identities resurrected in the absence of centralized authority.

Houthis- not-so-ardent Shiite sect- emerged as a major force in war-torn Yemen along with Hirak; a separatist movement in southern Yemen and the Islamist radical who also joined the anti-Saleh forces. The ascendancy of Houthis amid the conflict has caused new dynamic which can be characterized as the fragmentation of political

source of legitimacy. The dualism between north and south, weakness of its economic and political institutions and fragility of its reference as a nation and the polymorphic dimension of the state has led to the reversal of political process pursued in the early days of uprising.

Narratives dealing with Yemen support the image of its permeability to foreign intervention. Intrusion and meddling in each other affairs is the major strategic characteristic in this part of the world. The aim of this paper is to explore and interrogate the role of external powers, particularly regional powers (Iran and Saudi Arabia) in instigating the crisis and keeping the pot boiling. Further it explores the volatile nature of the proxies in the country which are not allowing the peace to take place. Finally this paper argues what role regional and global powers can play in restoring political and social stability in the country.

Regional Integration and Conflict Prevention: The Middle East Gas Pipelines

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Abstract:

Studying the formation of the European Union demonstrates that conflict prevention can be achieved through regional integration and a process of cooperation. Regional integration, thus one might assume, could also be applied to Middle Eastern (ME) countries to prevent conflicts and war in the region. The main problem is that most ME states, do not have strong trade relations with their neighbours and even in some cases are even rivals and often in conflict with each other. Such rivalries can be seen through suspended or delayed gas pipeline plans due to the lack of security. As the result, although the countries of the region have the largest gas reserves in the world, there are no global gas exporters among them and even some of them have become gas importers, particularly of LNG. In fact, inter-states rivalry and conflict has affected almost all gas pipeline plans for exporting gas to other countries in the region or to European and Asian markets.

The main aim of this study is to review whether applying regional integration and cooperation processes to Middle Eastern countries can end conflicts and bring peace to the region. It focuses on ME policies towards gas pipeline networks and deploys theoretical perspectives on cooperation, regional integration, and balance of power to get a better understanding of the role of gas pipeline networks in improving stability in the region.

On the past, present and future of the so-called 'outside in approach' to Israel-Palestine, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia.

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Abstract:

The so-called 'outside-in approach' to Israel-Palestine has regained momentum throughout the last months (even years), on the back of relentless rumours about an eventual normalisation of relations (nowadays behind closed doors) between Israel and Gulf countries. The 'outside-in approach' represents a fancy name to designate a regional approach to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A closer look to the evolution of conflict resolution casts light on the fact that today's approach is nothing but the last round of multilateral approaches to Middle East peace-making that, in different contexts and configurations, have been attempted since the 1980s in what could be called a regionalisation of conflict resolution efforts. Those approaches were oftentimes additionally based on a regional convergence of interests between Israel and the/some member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Unofficial relations have not yet shaped up as a true 'alliance' and go back several decades – even before the design of a genuine regional approach to peace in Israel/Palestine.

This paper will depart from an overview of these relations, both from a purely bilateral and a multilateral perspective, focusing mainly on the post- 'Arab Spring' context and today's variable-geometry Middle East. So as to provide a comprehensive overview of past and current contexts and identify the variables that might have impacted on the regional approach towards peace, the paper will differentiate between key periods, and subsequently address the Gulf's geopolitical considerations, what I would call the 'personal dimension' – i.e., the attitude of Gulf leaders towards the Palestinian question, and the role the Gulf states have played with regards to the Palestinian political arena. It will afterwards assess the prospects of normalisation of relations between Israel and the GCC states, focusing on the red lines the latter could take into consideration when assessing the threat normalisation could pose to their internal and external legitimacy. The bulk of the paper will concentrate on Saudi Arabia as undisputable leader of the Gulf sub-region and potential leader of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The results show that GCC states have always prioritised their regional security considerations over the needs of the Palestinian cause. That has led to a regionalization of the conflict in which the decisions were made for the Palestinians and a multilateral approach was favoured. Contacts with – and the mere existence of – Israel have been demonised just on a discursive level, and the regional approach to

peace has been devised as an additional resort to legitimise its actuators both on the international and regional, and on the domestic level.

BRI as a diplomatic and security tool in the Gulf

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Abstract:

The discussion on Gulf-Asia relations rarely focuses beyond the expanding economic ties between the oil-rich producers and some of the biggest energy consumers. Exploring the ‘what next’ dimension of this engagement reveals tentative, but interesting, attempts to diversify towards ‘strategic’ cooperation that offer alternative possibilities for Gulf security and stability in the long term.

One such venture is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The focus of the first five years of the BRI was on the economic dimensions, laced with a tinge of politics. It is likely that the next five years of this ambitious project – while making headway in the economic domain and acquiring a greater political flavour – would also attain a security dynamic that could become the basis of a future global security system, with ramifications for the Gulf region.

The paper, thus, focuses on two interconnected issues: one, the already-evident traces of the BRI’s economic-political-security linkages; and two, how this security feature expands to fit into China’s wider diplomatic and defence policy, which includes a naval plan extending into the Indian Ocean, and how it could impact Gulf security.

The first part of the paper argues that since a large part of the BRI routes are vulnerable to multiple tensions, it is most likely that increasing Chinese investments would see a corresponding increase in Chinese security presence to protect its interests. Traces of this strategy is already evident in several places.

The second part of the paper analyses how this economic-centric security outline could expand to acquire a much more political-centric security slant, offering potential alternatives to the existing US-centric diplomacy and security architecture in the region, thus potentially contributing to its stability.

Further, it explores the possibility of China attempting to use other institutions like the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc., along with the BRI, as instruments to project an alternative global leadership narrative. Here the emphasis would be on China’s potential role in addressing tension

between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on one side and Iran on the other.

Finally, the paper also stresses the need for China to pursue a broader cooperative approach by incorporating other influential countries around the world to evolve and achieve a new era of peace and stability through an Asian-led collective security architecture for the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia-Iran: Rivalry over Gulf Hegemony in a Fluid and Transitional Global System

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Abstract:

The paper aims to gain insight into the future scenarios and outcomes of the zero-sum game between the Karamazov Brothers; in addition, it sheds light on the sectarian, political and economic facades of antagonistic bilateral relations. It portrays the intersecting relations among the global and regional political actors.

In further analysis, it explores the volatile nature of the alliances and hostilities in the Middle East. The paper argues that the future scenarios of the bilateral rivalry depend mainly on the following variables: firstly, the global and regional balance of power and political arrangements; secondly, the outcomes of proxy wars and the level of superior powers involvement in them; thirdly, the internal political and economic conditions in both states; fourthly, the solidarity of the Sunni axis; fifthly, the possible initiative of Putin to mediate between his Middle-Eastern allies.

Towards Sustainable Peace in the Gulf: Localisation and Regionalisation of Conflict Resolution - Theory, Practices and Prospects

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Abstract:

(The Gulf region in the prevailing times, presents the picture of a region in deep turmoil. This region has, in fact, been in a state of continuous flux for a considerable period of history. More particularly, since the end of the Second World War, different parts of this region has been embroiled in internecine conflicts of various types which does not show any sign of abatement. It seems that there are no ends to these conflicts though there has been various attempts at ensuring peace in this region.

When a deeper analysis is made towards fathoming out the reason for the failure of conflict resolution process in this region, it comes out that this region has its own uniqueness and peculiarities which were not taken well care of in the conflict resolution process. This means that the indigenous way of, 'conceptualizing and experiencing the world' which would otherwise constitute, a crucially important element in devising any strategy for conflict resolution for a region, were not considered while formulating the strategy. As a concept, the very root of peace building lie in community development and social well-being informed by the local contextual settings, but the standardization and expertisation of approaches surrounding peace-building under the overarching liberal peace-building template of immediate lection and quick-free-market-reform not only marginalized but actually ignored the local communities from participation. The critical peace-building scholarship (Leonardsson, Rudd, Funk, Mitchell etc..) has rightly brought forth this aspect.

The Gulf region has particularly suffered from this limitation and that is a very important reason for the fact that the conflict resolution efforts in this part of the world have not been successful. Scholars like Galtung and Paul Salem has highlighted this aspect. Galtung has famously and rightly so, remarked that indigenous worldviews are marginalized through westernization and Salem has specifically critiqued the western conflict resolution from an Arab perspective.

This paper will, therefore, first try to reason out the factors responsible for the continuance of conflicts in the Arab world by analyzing the different conflicts and the methods of resolving them. In doing so, an attempt will be made to trace the

philosophical origin and the intellectual assumptions behind the conflict resolution mechanism followed in the region. Afterwards, on the basis of the detailed analysis, a case will be made to support the argument for the indigenous approaches for conflict resolution in this region – an approach based on culturally appropriate and locally owned knowledge. The paper will bring home the point that indigenous and locally accepted solution must be the priority for enduring peace to come in this region. The paper will be based on theoretical, analytical approach.)

Comprehensive Security Regime in Gulf Region: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract:

In international politics, regional initiatives to establish peace and security has been recognised as more appropriate and pragmatic in the present complex interconnected interdependent security scenario. Regional security regime initiated and promoted both by regional and extra-regional powers which becomes instrumental in resolving, preventing and managing crises that grown and nurtured in the regional landscape. Regional security mechanism is outcome of interplay between state and international initiatives surrounding various interconnected issues and area. Significantly, comprehensive security regime is preferably the unique one among all other security regimes.

Comprehensive security regime is a mechanism in which actors must recognize that issues pose risks for the regional security and actions are required to be taken cooperatively to avert those risks from becoming full-blown threats to that security. Comprehensive security leads to shared security culture, which consists of “cognitive, affective and evaluative predispositions which shape foreign and security perceptions and policies of a collective entity.” Seemingly, methodologically, comprehensive security is complex combination of both realist and idealist approaches in dealing with issues of security such as economics, human rights, and /or the environment. The best example, of the Comprehensive Security regime is OSCE.

The Gulf region as identified by scholar of security studies as the sub-regional security complex where the conflicting issues among parties involved are very much interlinked and cross region in nature. Particularly, the regional political rivalry between two regional powers Saudi Arabi and Iran based on differing Islamic world view or on sectarianism, have been preserved and promoted by involvement of the regional actors both state and non-state. However, these faultlines have been

industriously exploited and used by extra-regional powers since Cold War period till today for the promotion and protection of their perceived vital national interests. Consequently, Iraq, Yemen and Syria have become fertile ground for the emergence of non-state actors such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL) which threatens peace and security of Gulf. The external involvement on multiple levels have, in fact, aggravated the existing crisis ridden Gulf regional security environment. Gulf security can primarily be analysed on three levels namely, societal, state and regional. The social fabric has been broken through sectarian and ethnic flavour, state level conflict has been preserved and promoted through boundary disputes and regional peace and stability has been threatened by complex combination of hot and cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, supported and prolonged by regional and international power politics. Moreover, Accordingly, peace, prosperity and development of individual, society, state and region have been completely non-existent. Not to mention, the power inside, the United States' inconsistent policy and decaying popularity among masses have strengthened the rival forces in enhancing their regional agendas.

A new Gulf security architecture is at times defined as informal security cooperation while at other times as a formal institution composed of nation-states. In both usages, the principal aim is to induce Iran to break away from its decades-old isolation from security discussions with its Gulf neighbours. Moreover, there exists one thread that can pull all these loose parts in stable fashion: pursuing a Comprehensive Security Regime. The security concerns of Iran, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the Gulf States, Syria and Turkey are mutually dependent and cannot be addressed separately. Based on the above conceptual framework the paper attempts to explore the feasibility of regional security initiative which can address all three levels of crises- societal, state and regional- and take multi-pronged all-encompassing, multi focused, multi-layered action in resolving, preventing and managing every kind of conflict and create conducive environment for confidence building measures that finally leads to the evolution of security culture as existing in OSCE. In fact, attracted by its strategic location, immense oil reserves and above all, the great powers penetration through treaties, bases, arms transfer and overt military intervention, Gulf region assumes significance to examine prospects and prevailing challenges in the way of creating comprehensive security regime based on positive-sum approach to security.

Asia and the Saudi-Iranian “Cold War”. The Desirability of Non-Alignment, the Prospects for Détente, and the Chances of an Asian Peace Initiative

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Abstract:

The Post-Arab Spring turmoil in countries like Syria, Iraq, and the Yemen has several complex causes. Besides the involvement of rivalrous extra-regional great powers arming and supporting partly opposite sides in the region, one other key driving force perpetuating the anarchic conflicts via proxies is the “Cold War” between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thus, any comprehensive diplomatic initiative aiming to contain the contagious violence and to pacify the region will – among many other things – require a détente, if not a solution to end the Saudi-Iranian Cold War.

Ideological Polarity and Decision makers Perceptions: Under-balancing in the Middle East – The case of Saudi-Turkish Engagement

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Abstract:

Turkey and Saudi Arabia both are amongst the leading political powers of the Muslim world. Their influence and policies critically affect the political events taking place in the Muslim world in general and Middle East in particular. Both are linked with each other through strong religious ties and also share the similarity in terms of being close United States allies. The two powers share a common vision for peace and stability in the region as well as have been ardent supporters of the Palestinian cause. These political commonalities have contributed in strengthening the bilateral relationship of both nations over the years. The highest mark in the relationship came when Turkey initiated a strategic dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in September 2008. This initiative paved the way for the institutionalization of the close relationship between Turkey and the GCC member states of which Saudi Arabia is a leading member. These steps also led to an increase in bilateral trade and mutual economic endeavors . The paper will analyze the state of affairs between both countries at the dawn of Arab Spring and their political vision for the region as

advocated and pushed by their respective decision makers. The reaction of both countries towards Arab Spring events will be investigated in the light of the ideological underpinnings of their leadership and their maneuvers will be discussed in the context of regional balance of power. The research will try to explain how responses of Turkey and its ally Qatar on one hand and Saudi Arabia and its political allies on other gradually evolved into a political struggle for regional hegemony. The role of ideological factors as well as the perception and preferences of decision makers with reference to Haas's theorization of ideological polarity and under-balancing will be applied on the case of Saudi-Turkish engagement in order to analyze the pattern of their relationship post-Arab. It will be argued that owing to the presence of multiple ideological diffraction points between the two sides attempts to balance against Iran were unsuccessful.

Security Dynamics and the Role of Turkey in the Gulf and Middle East Region

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Abstract:

The demographic profile in all six GCC countries is tremendously changing due to the instability in the region. Gulf and Middle East has become the land of diplomatic Crisis and Conflicts. This area has always been significant for the both developing and developed countries because of its wealth of oil and Energy sources. Turkey had unprecedented relations with the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) under AKP (Justice and Development party) led government, ever since 2002. Furthermore, Turkey also has regional security interests in the Gulf region. Despite the instability and diplomatic Crisis in the Gulf and Middle East, Turkey continued its trade and commerce with the region. In 2017, Turkey has increased its trade with the region by 22.1 percent as compared to its \$56.4 billion of last year. However, the Middle East has facing instability, particularly in Palestine-Israel, Iraq, and Syria. Moreover, Syria has become the most complex war since World War II. This Crisis emerged into a complicated War that involves multiple actors. In addition, Turkey has also been deeply involved against the Syrian government and supporting Syrians to liberate. Turkey was not just the involved in Syrian Crisis, but also provided a home to more than 3.2 million refugees of Syria, and become the country to host the largest number of refugees in the world. Consequently, Turkey's tensions in Syria are coming in Turkish domestic policy. Turkey has past security issues with Kurds on the Iran, Iraq and Syrian borders. US had been providing weapons to YPG to fight ISI (Islamic State) in Syria, while Turkey is concerned, it may give weapons to PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) too. Consequently, it may empower PKK and emerge as

a danger for Turkey. Hence, Turkey has legitimate security concerns in the Gulf and Middle East region. The proposed study has following hypotheses: In GCC and Middle East region, style and substance of Turkish foreign policy twisted up to large extent. Apart from being a 'security provider' in its larger neighborhood, Ankara aimed to grasp a European style of Turkish politics which led to an increase in a number of interests groups. Turkey's role in GCC and Middle East region, through political, economic and security perspectives is rising, despite the instability in the region. The present paper has following objectives: to evaluate the role and Security policies of Turkish in the Gulf and the Middle East; to examine recent Turkish policies for the Gulf and Middle East after Syrian Crisis; to explain the impact of refugees on Turkey. In the above contextual details, the present study would examine following research questions: what extent GCC states and Turkey can further cooperate, especially in soft security issues at a time when many sectarian-based hard security issues are erupting? What are the challenges in front of the Turkish government to deal with security issues in the Gulf and the Middle East? What will be Turkey's new diplomatic and trade regional policy with the new alliances in the Gulf and the Middle East region? Do Turkish new policies will help in conflict resolution of Syria and, what will be its implications for the Gulf region?