



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 9

GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective - Sponsored by Derasat

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Abstract

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have ushered in a period of instability in the Middle East. Multiple regional and extra-regional powers are currently locked in a battle to expand their influence within the Arabian Gulf, forcing the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to reformulate their security strategy. GCC-Iraqi relations are a key component of GCC policy. This workshop aims to discuss the development of GCC-Iraqi relations and their prospects. Special emphasis will be laid on the consequences of the pullout of US forces from the region.

Description and Rationale

Numerous international interests face off in the Arabian Gulf. The region's centrality to world energy markets ensures that the actions of extra-regional players have an important role in determining the balance of power therein. One of the most recent disruptions to the status quo has been the emergence of radical groups as threats to US interests and the subsequent US-led war in Iraq. While the consequences have been manifold and

complex, one of the more prominent outcomes has been a substantial expansion in the Iranian sphere of influence, especially in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have not stood by idly, but have been reshaping large components of their foreign strategy. Looking inwards, the GCC states have continued to explore integration along economic, diplomatic, political and security dimensions. Looking outwards, the GCC states have reassessed existing long-term strategic partnerships, such as those with the US and UK, and looked to expand others, such as those with Turkey and India. An important dimension of GCC strategy has been relations with Iraq. GCC-Iranian rivalry is currently the primary narrative in the Arabian Gulf, and so GCC relations with Iraq are to a significant extent mediated by relations with Iran. Nevertheless, the GCC has a long history of interacting with Iraq directly, creating a more nuanced bilateral relationship. This workshop aims to discuss the development and prospects of GCC-Iraqi relations. There will be a particular emphasis on the prospects for relations in light of the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and what opportunities or constraints such a move represents.

The GCC states privately and publicly opposed the US invasion of Iraq. Early efforts to establish diplomatic ties with the new government failed dramatically when the Iraqis could not even guarantee the safety of GCC representatives. Since then, relations have arguably deteriorated, as reflected in the recent border disputes between Kuwait and Iraq. The prospects for rehabilitation currently seem dim with a potentially relevant side-story being the rapidly increasing oil production in Iraq, which has already overtaken Kuwaiti output, and could have significant consequences for the other GCC oil producers.

Optimally reconfiguring their strategies in response to the two wars has been an arduous task for the GCC states. Other contemporaneous developments – coincidental or otherwise – have changed the rules of the game, rendering the task even more precarious. Some of these merit particular attention.

First, the neutralization of two of Iran's archrivals allowed the Islamic Republic to direct resources towards its missile systems and its nuclear program, plunging the region into further instability. Much to the chagrin of Western politicians, one of the most salient results has been a tripling of oil prices since 9/11.

Second, the (seemingly unending) Great Recession has forced a rethink of the US international defense policies, including its capacity to deploy troops in areas such as Iraq. Democrats and Republicans are currently oceans apart on what policies best serve US interests; however, one of the rare areas of legislative and executive consensus has been the issue of major cutbacks in the defense budget. More worryingly for the US Department of Defense, a \$600 billion spending cut is hanging over its head if the US government fails to slash its ballooning deficit. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has already been wheeling out management-consulting rhetoric about the 'benefits' of a smaller military: "Capability is more important than size... This budget does not lead to a military in decline. Rather it matches capabilities to needs." The Arabian Gulf currently boasts a huge US military presence: over 50,000 combat

personnel stationed in multiple bases and 25 warships supporting two aircraft carriers. Doubts over its sustainability have started to influence the GCC states' security strategy, including the components that relate to Iraq. This is further complemented by the announcement in Washington about the "pivot" to Asia.

Third, the last 30 years have witnessed an expansion in the role of non-state actors (NSAs) in international relations, including the GCC. The US invasions were to a large extent triggered by the activities of Al-Qaida, an archetypical NSA. Today, Al-Qaida is one of a litany of NSAs that influence the GCC states' strategic goals in Iraq. Iraq itself remains wracked by instability, opening the door for networks of religious extremists such as the Quds Force. In fact, some of the NSAs active in the region are responsible for the increased sectarianism witnessed in the wake of the Afghani and Iraqi wars. These NSAs often transcend the political separation between the GCC and Iraq, creating serious strategic challenges for policymakers on all sides.

Finally, the Arab Spring has created a cloud of uncertainty over the Middle East, compounding the effects of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Previously stable alliances have been heavily strained, both within the region and between regional and extra-regional players. The new equilibrium balance of power is yet to be determined, inviting feverish cross-boundary interference — overt and covert — from across the world, in turn accentuating the downside risk of strategic planning.

GCC-Iraqi relations are important determinants of the new order emerging in the Arabian Gulf. The sheer pace of change means that a comprehensive assessment of the many issues outlined earlier is yet to be completed. This workshop aims to help rectify that deficiency.

Anticipated Papers

We welcome papers on the issues discussed above. In the interests of providing some structure, we provide some themes and related questions below. Please note that they are subject to change; they are intended to be exploratory rather than exhaustive.

GCC RELATIONS WITH IRAQ

- How have GCC-Iraqi relations changed in the aftermath of the US withdrawal?
- What is the future of the Iraqi political system and what are its repercussions on the GCC?
- Can Iraqi sectarian radicalization be contained? How does it impact the GCC?
- After its partial success in overcoming the Yemeni crisis, can the GCC bloc be a force for stability in Iraq?
- Does increasing Iraqi oil production represent an opportunity or a threat to the GCC?

OTHER REGIONAL PLAYERS IN GCC-IRAQI RELATIONS

- Do improved GCC-Iraqi relations encroach upon Iranian interests?
- What role can GCC-Iraqi relations have in promoting regional stability as US military commitments to the region decline?
- As the GCC forges better relations with Turkey, what are the effects of Turkey's disputes with Iraq on GCC policy in Iraq?
- What are the effects of the Syrian crisis upon GCC-Iraqi relations?

Workshop Director Profiles

Omar Al-Ubaydli is a senior fellow at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, an affiliated assistant professor of economics at George Mason University, an affiliated senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center and a member of Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's Joint Advisory Board of Economists.

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Selected Readings

Ahmed, Nafeez Mosaddeq (2003). *Behind the War on Terror: Western Secret Strategy and the Struggle for Iraq* (New Society Publishers).

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Sadeghinia, Mahboubeh (2011). *Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf: With Special Reference to Iran's Foreign Policy* (Ithaca Press, NY).

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