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Knowledge for All

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Workshop No. 5

Yemen at the Gulf's Crossroads: State Fragmentation, Regional Order, Peacebuilding, and the Future of Gulf-Yemen Relations

1. **Directors**

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2. **Abstract**

Yemen occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of Gulf regional politics, Red Sea security, state transformation, and international efforts to address protracted conflict. Its proximity to Saudi Arabia and Oman, its strategic location along the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, and its dense historical, social, economic, and political connections with the Gulf make Yemen not simply an external security concern for Gulf states, but an important arena in which regional order is produced and contested.

This workshop examines Yemen as a critical case for understanding the changing relationship between state fragmentation and Gulf regional politics. It moves beyond approaches that treat the Yemeni conflict primarily as a domestic crisis or a bilateral security problem and instead investigates the reciprocal relationship between Yemen's political transformation and the interests, strategies, and security concerns of Gulf states.

The workshop brings together scholars and practitioners working on state fragmentation, regional security, peacebuilding, political economy, migration, maritime security, and inclusive governance. Particular attention will also be given to the implications of Saudi Arabia's evolving regional diplomacy, Oman's mediation efforts, and Gulf economic transformation agendas, including Vision 2030 initiatives and emerging regional connectivity projects linking Yemen to the wider Gulf economy. Particular attention will be given to the interaction between fragmented political authority and regional intervention; the implications of Yemen's political settlement for Gulf security; economic interdependence, reconstruction, and migration; and the role of women, civil society, and locally grounded actors in peacebuilding.

By bringing Yemen more centrally into Gulf Studies, the workshop seeks to generate theoretically informed and policy-relevant research on how regional powers interact with fragmented states, how those interactions shape pathways toward peace and institutional recovery, and how the future of Yemen may contribute to the evolution of Gulf regional order.

3. Context

Yemen represents one of the most consequential cases at the intersection of Gulf and wider Middle Eastern politics. Its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia and Oman, its position adjacent to the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, and its longstanding social, economic, and political connections with Gulf societies have made developments in Yemen directly relevant to Gulf security and regional stability. Yet Gulf–Yemen relations extend considerably beyond conventional interstate security. Cross-border communities, labor mobility, migration, trade, remittances, humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, political networks, and shared security concerns have created dense and multidimensional relationships between Yemen and its Gulf neighbors. These relationships have evolved alongside major transformations in Yemen's political order, particularly the erosion of central state institutions and the emergence of competing centers of political and territorial authority.

The transformations following the 2011 uprising and subsequent political transition further altered the relationship. Institutional fragmentation, armed conflict, competing claims to legitimacy, and the emergence of de facto authorities created a political environment in which Gulf states have had to navigate overlapping security, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical interests. The result has been a relationship that cannot be adequately understood through the conventional categories of foreign policy or interstate rivalry alone.

The Yemeni conflict also raises broader theoretical questions concerning the relationship between fragmented states and regional powers. Regional intervention may respond to domestic fragmentation, but it can simultaneously interact with and reshape the institutional structures within which political authority is exercised. Understanding this reciprocal relationship is essential for analyzing both Yemen's political trajectory and the evolution of Gulf regional order.

The limitations of approaches centered primarily on military confrontation and elite bargaining are increasingly evident. A sustainable political settlement will depend not only on agreements among major political and armed actors, but also on institutional arrangements, local governance, economic recovery, social cohesion, and meaningful participation by women and civil society. These dimensions are directly connected to the interests of Gulf states, whose future relationship with Yemen will extend beyond conflict management toward questions of governance, reconstruction, economic connectivity, and regional security.

Yemen's strategic significance has also expanded through developments in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab. Recent transformations in Gulf foreign policy and economic development strategies have increased the importance of Yemen for regional planning and connectivity. Saudi Vision 2030, regional logistics corridors, energy infrastructure projects, and emerging Gulf-Red Sea economic linkages highlight the need to examine Yemen not only through the lens of conflict and security, but also as a potential partner in future regional economic integration. Maritime insecurity has demonstrated the interconnectedness of Gulf, Red Sea, and international security systems, raising questions about collective security arrangements, economic connectivity, trade routes, and regional responses to transnational threats.

Against this backdrop, the workshop places Yemen within Gulf Studies not as a peripheral case, but as an analytically significant site for understanding regional order, state transformation, and peacebuilding. It asks how Yemen's political fragmentation affects the Gulf, how Gulf policies and institutions shape Yemen's political and economic trajectories, and what forms of regional engagement could contribute to sustainable peace and institutional recovery. The central premise is therefore reciprocal: Yemen is shaped by the Gulf regional environment, while developments in Yemen simultaneously reshape the security, political, economic, and institutional environment of the Gulf.

4. Workshop Focus/Objectives

Yemen represents one of the most consequential cases at the intersection of Gulf and wider Middle Eastern politics. Its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia and Oman, its location adjacent to the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, and its longstanding social,

economic, and political connections with Gulf societies have made developments in Yemen directly relevant to Gulf security and regional stability. Yet Gulf–Yemen relations extend considerably beyond conventional interstate security. Cross-border communities, labor mobility, migration, trade, remittances, humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, political networks, and shared security concerns have created dense and multidimensional relationships between Yemen and its Gulf neighbors. These relationships have evolved alongside major transformations in Yemen's political order, particularly the erosion of central state institutions and the emergence of competing centers of political and territorial authority.

The workshop seeks to examine Yemen not simply as a conflict setting, but as a central component of the evolving Gulf regional order. It will bring together scholars and practitioners to explore how Yemen's fragmented political order interacts with the changing strategies of Gulf states, and how these interactions affect regional security, political settlement, economic interdependence, governance, and prospects for sustainable peace.

The central analytical question guiding the workshop is:
How does the interaction between Yemen's fragmented political order and the evolving strategies of Gulf states shape the prospects for regional security, political settlement, economic recovery, governance, and sustainable peace?

The workshop will pursue five interconnected objectives:

1. To examine Yemen's political fragmentation and its implications for Gulf–Yemen relations, with particular attention to competing centers of authority, changing forms of sovereignty, border governance, regional diplomacy, and the evolution of relations between Yemeni and Gulf actors.
2. To analyze Yemen's position within the changing Gulf and Red Sea security environment, including border security, maritime security, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, armed non-state actors, transnational security challenges, commercial shipping, and emerging regional security arrangements.
3. To assess the role of Gulf states in Yemen's political settlement and institutional reconstruction, focusing on mediation, regional diplomacy, decentralization, power-sharing, legitimacy, local governance, state reconstruction, and the relationship between national and subnational authorities.
4. To explore the economic and social interdependence between Yemen and the Gulf, including labor mobility, migration, remittances, trade, infrastructure, energy networks, humanitarian and development assistance, reconstruction, and the prospects for post-conflict economic recovery.

5. To examine inclusive approaches to peacebuilding and human security, with particular attention to women, youth, civil society, local peace initiatives, social cohesion, community resilience, and the potential contribution of Gulf institutions to more inclusive peace processes.
6. To assess the implications of Gulf economic transformation agendas for Yemen, including Saudi Vision 2030, regional connectivity initiatives, logistics corridors, labor market transformations, investment opportunities, and prospects for economic integration between Yemen and the GCC states.

Taken together, these objectives are intended to move the discussion beyond immediate conflict management and toward a broader examination of the long-term political, economic, social, and security relationships linking Yemen and the Gulf.

5. Paper Focus/Topics

Suggested Research Topics and Proposed Paper Titles:

Theme 1: Yemen's Political Fragmentation and the Future of Gulf–Yemen Relations
1. Re-mapping Regional Proximity: Institutional Fragmentation and the Redefinition of Gulf–Yemeni Relations
2. From Bilateral Diplomacy to Regional Engagement: Gulf States' Policies Toward a Fragmented Yemen
3. Sovereignty in Transition: Competing Authorities in Yemen and the Implications for Gulf Regional Order
4. The Evolution of Border Governance: Security, Mobility, and Cross-Border Dynamics between Saudi Arabia and Yemen

Theme 2: Yemen and the Transformation of Gulf and Red Sea Security
5. Securing the Bab al-Mandab: Yemen's Domestic Conflict and the Transformation of Red Sea Maritime Security
6. Beyond Deterrence: Missile, Drone, and Transnational Security Challenges in the Southern Arabian Peninsula
7. Navigating Maritime Insecurity: Collective Security Arrangements and Commercial Shipping in the Red Sea
8. Non-State Armed Actors, Regional Powers, and the Transformation of Security Strategies in the Gulf and Yemen

Theme 3: Gulf States and the Political Settlement in Yemen
9. Mediation and Regional Diplomacy: Assessing Gulf Engagement in Yemen's Political Settlement

10. Decentralization, Power-Sharing, and State Reconstruction: Governance Options for a Post-Conflict Yemen
11. The Dilemmas of External Intervention: Regional Powers and the Prospects for a Sustainable Political Settlement in Yemen
12. Legitimacy, Authority, and Local Governance: Rebuilding State Institutions from the Local Level

Theme 4: Gulf–Yemen Economic Interdependence and Post-Conflict Recovery
13. Saudi Vision 2030 and Yemen: Pathways for Regional Economic Integration and Recovery
14. GCC States and the Future of Yemen's Political Settlement
15. Regional Economic Integration between Yemen and the GCC: Opportunities and Constraints
16. The Role of GCC Institutions in Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Recovery
17. The Political Economy of Remittances and Labor Mobility in Gulf–Yemen Relations
18. Reconstructing Infrastructure and Energy Networks: The Role of Gulf Development Cooperation in Yemen's Recovery
19. Trade Corridors and Economic Resilience: Integrating Yemen into Emerging Gulf Economic Networks
20. From Humanitarian Assistance to Sustainable Development: Rethinking External Financial Support and Institutional Recovery in Yemen

Theme 5: Inclusive Peacebuilding, Civil Society, and Human Security
21. Women, Peace, and Security: Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives into Yemeni Peace Processes
22. Local Peace Initiatives and Community Resilience: The Role of Civil Society in Fragmented Political Settings
23. Youth, Employment, and Social Resilience: Building Foundations for Long-Term Stability in Yemen
24. Inclusive Governance and Social Cohesion: Addressing Generational and Social Transformations in Post-Conflict Yemen

6. Publication Plans

The workshop is designed to generate a coherent collective publication rather than a loose collection of papers.

• Primary Output: An edited academic volume (first choice) or a special issue of a peer-reviewed academic journal (second choice) coordinated by the workshop directors with GRC participation.

• Structure of the Volume: The publication will be organized into four cohesive sections matching the workshop themes, complete with an analytical concluding chapter by the

editors addressing the broader theoretical implications of regional powers interacting with fragmented states.
• Timeline: Following the workshop (20–22 July 2027), directors will finalize publication selections by 31 July 2027, receive revised final versions by 20 September 2027, and submit the complete manuscript package to the publisher/editor by 30 September 2027.

7. References

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Orkaby, A. (2017). Yemen: What Everyone Needs to Know. Oxford University Press.

Phillips, S. (2011). Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis. Routledge.

Salisbury, P. (2018). The Conflict in Yemen: From Ethnic Fighting to Food Wars. Chatham House.

Richmond, O. P. (2016). Peace Formation and Political Order in Conflict-Affected Societies. Oxford University Press.

8. Workshop Directors

Dr. Bakeel Ahmed Al-Zandani is a Yemeni academic and researcher based in Doha, Qatar. His expertise includes international relations, regional security, foreign policy, comparative political systems, and regional geopolitics. His research and academic publications, including co-authored studies on political systems and regional affairs, contribute theoretical and comparative perspectives to the study of state–society relations, regional order, and political dynamics in Yemen and the Gulf. His expertise complements the

workshop's focus on comparative politics, state fragility, regional security, and peacebuilding, contributing an interdisciplinary perspective to the analysis of Yemen–Gulf relations and the broader regional context.

Ahlam Abdullah is a Yemeni researcher and peacebuilding practitioner based in Belgium. Her expertise includes international relations, peacebuilding, international law, women, peace and security, migration, and Euro-Arab relations. At YGCS, she leads research on women's participation in peace processes, inclusive peacebuilding, and the role of civil society in Yemen. Her expertise complements the workshop's focus on comparative politics, state fragility, regional security, and peacebuilding, contributing an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of Yemen and Gulf–Yemen relations