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Knowledge for All

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Workshop No. 9

Chokepoints, Corridors, and Contested Waters: Maritime Security from the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea

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2. **Abstract**

The waters linking the Gulf to the wider world have rarely been more contested. From the Strait of Hormuz through the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea, a chain of chokepoints now faces attacks on shipping, vessel seizures, resurgent Somali piracy and the diversion of global trade.

This workshop treats these waters as a single, interconnected security environment and invites papers that examine how maritime insecurity is produced, classified and governed. Insecurity at sea is never simply a matter of incident numbers. Naval doctrine, international law, war-risk listings, insurance markets and the everyday decisions of those who work at sea all shape how it is understood. We welcome work on piracy and attacks by armed groups, maritime risk governance, naval coalitions and regional security architecture, private maritime security, critical maritime infrastructure, and new ways of theorizing maritime space.

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The workshop is a deliberate meeting point for academics and practitioners. We encourage submissions from scholars at all career stages and from those working in naval services, shipping, marine insurance, security consultancy and policy. Practitioners are welcome to submit papers that draw on operational, commercial or policy experience. All participants are expected to submit a full paper, which will be discussed at the workshop and considered for publication.

3. Context

Maritime security has become an increasingly consequential dimension of the Gulf regional order, yet scholarship and policy analysis continue to treat the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea largely as distinct strategic theatres. Recent developments demonstrate the limitations of such a fragmented approach. Attacks on commercial shipping, vessel seizures, the persistence and resurgence of piracy, disruptions to established trade routes, and the expansion of multinational naval deployments have effects that extend well beyond individual incidents. The Red Sea crisis, for example, has affected vessel operations, freight markets and global maritime supply chains, while raising wider questions about freedom of navigation, the resilience of maritime trade and the adequacy of existing security arrangements (Notteboom, Haralambides, & Cullinane 2024; Rodriguez-Diaz, Alcaide, & Garcia-Llave 2024). The 2026 conflict in and around the Strait of Hormuz has likewise disrupted transit through one of the world's most important energy chokepoints and raised pressing legal questions about transit passage (Nevitt 2026). These developments suggest that the Gulf and its adjacent waters should be understood as an interconnected maritime security environment rather than as a series of discrete regional spaces.

The workshop builds on an expanding interdisciplinary literature that conceptualizes maritime security as a multidimensional political and governance challenge (Boşilcă, Ferreira, & Ryan 2022). Bueger and Edmunds (2024) show that maritime security encompasses interstate conflict, terrorism, piracy, and other forms of maritime crime, and involves diverse actors and governance instruments, including information-sharing, maritime domain awareness, coordination, and capacity-building. Research on naval strategy and seapower similarly emphasizes the importance of maritime doctrine, naval presence, coalition-building, and the relationship between military power and broader forms of maritime order (Krause & Bruns 2016; Speller 2023; Till 2018). At the same time, scholarship on modern piracy demonstrates how threats at sea evolve in response to changing political and economic conditions and generate complex patterns of international response (McCabe 2017).

Taken together, this work shows that maritime insecurity is not simply a question of military incidents but of how risks are identified, interpreted and governed across public

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and private domains. This perspective also speaks to an emerging literature that challenges territorially bounded understandings of Gulf security. Verhoeven (2018) demonstrates the growing security interdependence between the Gulf and the Horn of Africa, while Simonds and Pearson (2026) conceptualize the Red Sea as an interregional geopolitical space, with its maritime corridors and chokepoints challenging conventional land-centric approaches to regionhood. Recent work on Gulf security likewise highlights tensions between external alignment and aspirations for greater regional autonomy (Miller & Kardaş 2026), while Albimani and Kardaş (2026) draw attention to the ongoing difficulties in developing common maritime-security policies within the GCC. These debates are particularly relevant to understanding how Gulf states, Iran and other regional actors respond to security challenges that cannot be contained within territorial boundaries.

The workshop further addresses the growing importance of critical maritime infrastructure and the political economy of maritime risk. Undersea communications cables, ports, shipping routes and other infrastructure constitute strategic assets whose disruption can have consequences that extend across national borders (Cannon 2026). Marine insurance markets also shape how insecurity is experienced at sea. War-risk listings and premiums translate incidents into commercial costs that influence routing, crewing and security decisions, giving insurers a governing role that is often overlooked (Simonds 2025). International law is equally central, particularly where security operations intersect with navigational rights and the legal status of strategically important waterways (Nevitt 2026). The role of European and other external actors also warrants greater attention. The EU's evolving maritime engagement in the region, including Operation Aspides, illustrates how external powers increasingly contribute to the governance of Gulf–Red Sea security while navigating competing regional priorities (Parente 2026).

Altogether, this literature points to an important research agenda on how maritime insecurity is produced and governed across interconnected waters. The workshop will bring these strands into dialogue by examining interactions among regional actors, external naval powers, international institutions and commercial stakeholders, thus advancing a more comprehensive understanding of Gulf regional order.

4. Workshop Focus/Objectives

This workshop examines maritime security as a regional and relational phenomenon across the interconnected waters from the Gulf to the Red Sea. It focuses on the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea, treating these spaces as components of a wider security environment in which threats, responses and strategic effects cross geographical boundaries. Recent attacks on commercial shipping, vessel seizures, the resurgence of piracy, intensified naval deployments and disruptions to established trading routes have underscored how developments in one maritime space can

trigger cascading consequences across the wider region. The workshop aims to address how and why maritime insecurity is constituted, experienced, and governed across this interconnected geography.

The workshop has three interrelated objectives.

First, it seeks to develop a more theoretically informed understanding of the production and governance of maritime insecurity. Rather than conceptualizing insecurity primarily through the incidence of attacks or other observable events, the workshop examines the processes through which states, navies, international organizations, and commercial actors identify, classify, and act on particular risks. Contributions may therefore engage with naval strategy and doctrine, international maritime law, maritime risk and insurance, private security, critical infrastructure, port governance, shipping practices and the changing spatial organization of maritime commerce.

Second, the workshop seeks to bridge the analytical divide between the Gulf and adjacent maritime theatres. A central concern is how maritime security practices and strategic perceptions connect the Gulf Cooperation Council states with Iran, Iraq and Yemen, as well as with external actors whose naval, commercial and regulatory activities shape the regional maritime order. Comparative and transregional contributions are particularly encouraged. These may examine, for instance, divergent regional approaches to maritime security, the relationship between developments in the Gulf and those in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, competing forms of naval cooperation and coalition-building, or the capacity of existing regional and international institutions to govern an increasingly fragmented maritime security environment.

Third, the workshop aims to connect scholarly analysis to contemporary policy challenges without reducing maritime security to a policy problem alone. It will consider the implications of evolving maritime risks for regional security architectures, freedom of navigation, the resilience of critical infrastructure and global supply chains, and the division of responsibilities between states and private actors. To this end, it will bring academic researchers into sustained dialogue with practitioners from naval services, shipping, insurance, maritime security and policy communities. Concluding discussions will translate the comparative insights from the papers into concrete policy recommendations on regional coordination, maritime domain awareness, crisis response, infrastructure protection, and the resilience of commercial shipping.

Ultimately, the workshop seeks to advance Gulf studies by reconceptualizing maritime security beyond the territorial boundaries of individual states. By situating Gulf waters within their wider maritime connections, it aims to produce a comparative, theoretically

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grounded account of how insecurity is produced and governed across contested waters, and to provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of existing regional and international responses.

5. Paper Focus/Topics

We welcome papers addressing maritime security across the interconnected waters from the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea, with particular attention to:

1. Maritime security, regional order and changing conceptions of the Arabian Gulf;
2. The Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and other strategic chokepoints;
3. Piracy, maritime terrorism, vessel seizures and attacks on commercial shipping;
4. Naval strategy, seapower, naval diplomacy and multinational maritime coalitions;
5. GCC maritime security cooperation and regional security architectures;
6. The maritime security approaches of Iran, Iraq and Yemen, including non-state actors such as Ansar Allah (the Houthis);
7. External actors, including the United States, European states, NATO, the EU and other extra-regional powers;
8. Freedom of navigation, maritime law and the governance of contested waters;
9. Maritime domain awareness, intelligence-sharing and crisis-response mechanisms;
10. Shipping, ports, insurance, war-risk markets and the political economy of maritime insecurity;
11. Critical maritime infrastructure, including undersea cables and offshore energy infrastructure;
12. Private maritime security and public–private approaches to risk governance;
13. The effects of maritime insecurity on trade, supply chains and regional economies;
14. Comparative and transregional approaches connecting the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea;
15. Theoretical and methodological approaches to maritime space, security governance and regional interdependence.

This list is not exhaustive. We also welcome papers on related topics that fit the aims of the workshop.

6. Publication Plans

The directors intend to publish every paper that reaches the required academic standard. Following GRC's order of preference, we will place as many papers as possible in a joint publication and will support the remaining authors to publish individually.

Edited volume (first choice). We envisage an edited volume provisionally titled *Chokepoints, Corridors and Contested Waters: Maritime Security from the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea*. The volume would make a coherent interdisciplinary contribution

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to Gulf studies by treating the Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea as an interconnected maritime security environment. Its provisional structure has four parts. Part I, Conceptualizing Maritime Security and Maritime Space, would examine regional order, maritime security governance and the politics of chokepoints. Part II, Threats and Risks at Sea, would address piracy, attacks on shipping, vessel seizures, critical infrastructure and emerging maritime threats. Part III, Actors, Strategies and Security Architectures, would examine GCC states, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, external naval powers, international organizations and maritime coalitions. Part IV, Commerce, Law and the Governance of Maritime Risk, would address freedom of navigation, international law, shipping, insurance, ports and supply-chain resilience.

An introduction, written by the two workshop directors, would establish the volume's theoretical framework and comparative research agenda, while the conclusion would synthesize the findings and draw implications for regional maritime governance and security policy. The directors will send the book proposal to GRC for The Contemporary Gulf Studies Series: Gulf and Global Perspectives, which GRC publishes with Bloomsbury and which includes volumes based on the Gulf Research Meeting. Should the volume not be taken up in that series, there are two prospective avenues. The first is Palgrave Macmillan's Contemporary Gulf Studies series, which publishes on Gulf security. The second is Routledge's Cass Series: Naval Policy and History, which publishes on naval and maritime security. Both directors already have links with these presses. Parente's forthcoming monograph is with Palgrave Macmillan and Simonds's 2025 monograph appeared in the Cass Series. In line with GRC requirements, GRC will be a party to the publishing agreement.

Special issue (second choice). If too few papers reach the standard needed for a volume, or if the workshop produces more publishable papers than one volume can hold, we will propose a special issue built around a coherent cluster of papers. Our first choice is the *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* (Routledge), whose remit covers the Arabian Peninsula, its surrounding waters and their connections with the Western Indian Ocean. The *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* (Taylor & Francis), which publishes research on maritime security and has hosted several special issues, is a strong alternative.

Individual journal articles (third choice). We will help the authors of any remaining publishable papers to target peer-reviewed journals that suit their focus. Papers on maritime governance and law could go to *Marine Policy* (Elsevier) or *Ocean Development & International Law* (Taylor & Francis). Papers on shipping, ports and insurance could go to *Maritime Policy & Management* (Taylor & Francis) or *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs* (Springer). Papers on naval strategy, piracy and armed groups could go to *Defence Studies*

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or *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (both Taylor & Francis). Papers on Gulf regional politics and external actors could go to *Middle East Policy* (Wiley), the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (Taylor & Francis) or *The International Spectator* (Taylor & Francis).

GRC working papers (fourth choice). Any paper that meets GRM standards but is not suited to these outlets could be published as a GRC working paper.

Timeline. Following GRC's timetable, the directors will send feedback to all authors by 31 July 2027, authors will submit revised papers by 20 September 2027, and materials will go to the publisher or journal editor by 30 September 2027.

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8. Workshop Directors

Dr. Giovanni Parente is a Fulbright Schuman's Visiting Scholar in Political Science at the University of Texas at Austin, co-funded by the European Commission and the United States Department of State and hosted by Professor Michael Mosser. He is currently on leave from University College Dublin, where he is a Research Ireland's Postdoctoral Research Fellow on a project on the European Union's maritime security strategy, mentored by Professor Ben Tonra. Previously, he was an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Trinity College Dublin, an Adjunct Lecturer at Dublin City University, and an Adjunct Professor at Maynooth University, the Irish Department of Defence, the Irish Military College, the Irish Naval Service, and the Armed Forces of Malta. Dr. Parente holds a PhD in History from Maynooth University, where he was an Irish Research Council/Research Ireland's "Government of Ireland" scholar, supervised by Professor Ian Speller. He is the author of "Rethinking Naval Diplomacy: Roles and Impacts of Smaller Member States on the European Union's Maritime Security Strategy" (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2027).

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Dr. Jessica Simonds is Assistant Professor in Defense and Security at Rabdan Academy, Abu Dhabi, where her research and teaching focus on maritime security, counter-piracy, and maritime risk governance. She is also a Visiting Scholar at Liverpool John Moores University. She is an external MA supervisor for International Relations at Abu Dhabi University. She previously held posts as Assistant Professor at the American University in the Emirates and Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Chester. Her research examines how maritime space is produced, secured, and commercially valued. A central strand concerns the marine insurance market and its role in shaping responses to piracy, the subject of her Routledge monograph *Maritime Insurance, Risk, and Seafarer Security: Navigating Piracy* in the Indian Ocean (2025), published in the Cass Series: Naval Policy and History. Drawing on oral histories with seafarers and insurance professionals, the book treats insurance not simply as a financial instrument but as a mechanism of risk governance, linking the political economy of shipping to the security decisions of shipowners, underwriters, flag states, and naval coalitions. Her recent work on the Red Sea includes a co-authored article in The Journal of North African Studies (2026) that reconceptualizes the Red Sea as an interregional maritime space, and a chapter on the Port of Al Hudaydah in a Springer volume from the International Arabian-Gulf Security Conference 2025. She holds a BA in International Politics and Conflict Studies, an MA in Violence, Terrorism and Security (with distinction) and a PhD in International Studies from Queen's University Belfast, and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her doctoral research developed a spatial account of maritime insecurity that informs her current work on vessel design, threat assessment, and regional maritime security in the Gulf of Oman and western Indian Ocean. She also brings practitioner experience from the commercial maritime risk sector, including at Ambrey, where she produced threat assessments and counter-piracy analysis and oversaw the researchers who maintained its online risk platform. She continues to write for industry readers, most recently on seafarer welfare in the MAST Risk Report (2026). Since 2021 she has been an adjunct lecturer for NATO's Maritime Center of Excellence, teaching on communication and information sharing and on the lifecycle of the transnational terrorist foreign fighter. This experience grounds her research in operational realities and orients it toward government, industry, and naval users.

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