



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

The Eighth Annual

Gulf Studies Forum

- **Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications**
- **Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies**

November 27-28, 2021

[About the Forum](#) | [Timetable](#) | [Participants](#) | [Abstracts](#) | [Session Chairs](#)



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About the Forum

Track 1: Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications

On 29 January 2020, the Ministry of Health of the United Arab Emirates reported the first recorded Covid-19 infection in the Arab Gulf, afflicting a family of four arriving from Wuhan, China. The Bahraini Ministry of Health announced the Gulf's first death from Covid-19 on 16 March 2020, of a 65-year-old Bahraini citizen. By the end of March 2021 Arab Gulf states had reported 1,583,806 covid infections (3.17 percent of their total population), with some 12,030 deaths, 1 percent of the Gulf's recorded infections, at the time nearly one third of the covid-19 pandemic's global deaths.

As in many countries, in early March 2020 Arab Gulf states adopted strict preventive measures to contain and combat the pandemic: canceling events, limiting movement of persons from countries severely affected by the virus, closing commercial, educational, tourism and religious facilities as well as parks, cafes, restaurants, airports, seaports and land routes and imposing complete or partial curfews, isolating various cities and residential or industrial zones, rationing public and private sector working hours, introducing inspection and examination protocols for sterilization, isolation and quarantine, and taking enormous financial measures to stimulate economies.

In subsequent weeks, Gulf Arab countries, with total energy revenues some 40 percent of GDP (80 percent of government revenues), received a massive jolt in a collapse of oil prices (Brent crude decreasing in 2020 from December's \$62 to April's \$21/ barrel) with the global economic paralysis brought on by worldwide adoption of the raft of soon familiar pandemic containment measures: closures of national industry, tourism, and commerce sectors and breakup of the world's transport, travel and logistics links. The sluggish global response to the pandemic and an international scramble for vaccines rather than collaboration in a spirit of cooperation together dampened hopes that had been revived by oil prices rising to \$65/barrel in March 2021 and prompting some to anticipate renewed oil price decreases and further contraction of non-oil revenues inside and outside the Arab Gulf countries produced by continuing disruptions across all economic sectors. The World Bank's April 2021 report pointed to a 7.7 percent 2020 shrinkage of Arab Gulf states' GDP growth rate.

Arab Gulf countries took immediate economic measures to limit the impact of the compound crises of Covid-19 and oil price collapse. In Saudi Arabia, the government imposed unprecedented austerity measures to reduce expenditures. It cancelled government agency operating and capital budget lines and slashed financial allocations for major fiscal year 2020 projects, cut financial benefits of employees and contractors, and increased tax levies. The UAE's federal government along with the seven emirates' local ones cut investment spending and administrative expenditure by 20 percent, froze new appointments and suspended existing projects, cancelling new ones. The Emir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani called for implementation of fundamental reforms to reduce public spending, to counteract the impact of oil price fluctuations. In Kuwait, the government

took measures to trim development allocations by \$2.3 billion and rescheduled 54 projects, additionally enacting 20 percent budget cuts of ministries and government agencies to rationalize government spending. Oman approved a raft of ministerial and government unit budget cuts and undertook to borrow to cover deficits incurred from weak revenues. In Bahrain the government took a set of radical measures to reduce government and operating expenditures by 30 percent.

To tackle the pandemic, Arab Gulf state governments have taken strict preventive health measures to enhance their health systems' efficiency, with close monitoring of the epidemiological curve in infection rates. Measures encompassed medical examination, isolation and quarantine procedures, and obligating citizens and residents to download smart phone contact tracing applications to enable comprehensive case incidence tracking procedures. Less than a year from the pandemic's outbreak, Arab Gulf states commenced prompt and inclusive Covid -19 vaccination coverage for their citizens and residents: inhabitants of the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar enjoy some of the highest rates of Covid-19 vaccine coverage in the world.

Track 2: Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies

The 5 January 2021 41st Gulf Summit in the Saudi Arabian city of Al-Ula ended the land, air and sea blockade of Qatar that had lasted three and a half years, a crisis that began with the arrival of US President Donald Trump to power in early 2017 and ended with his departure from the White House after losing the November 2020 elections.

While it is widely acknowledged that Al-Ula Summit's communique adopted by the Gulf Cooperation Council's leadership (along with that of Egypt) does indeed mark a turning point for the Gulf crisis, diverse stakeholders are continuing work to rid Arab Gulf states and societies of their political, economic, and social residues. That said, the lion's share of attention is accorded to understanding the impact of the reconciliation on the GCC countries' *foreign* policies and their stands on pressing regional and international issues. Disagreements on such issues was clearly a contributor to the eruption of the Gulf crisis, with differences encompassing the Arab Spring revolutions, Islamic movements, Palestine, regional non-Arab relations (with Iran, Turkey, and Israel), Arab catastrophes in Yemen, Libya and Syria, and emerging (or on-going) catastrophes in the Horn of Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea - among other areas of contention in very chaotic world.

The Qatar blockade crisis also brought home the decreasing level of United States commitment to Gulf security - beyond the confines of her struggle against other great powers for supremacy - notwithstanding a continued US eye on the region lest her rivals seek to wield control over its oil resources and supply lines. The tepid American reaction to the September 2019 strike against Saudi

oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais (shutting down one-half of Saudi oil production) is a testament to the radical transformation underway in Washington's commitments.

In so far as US President Joe Biden's administration is seeking to alleviate Saudi-Iranian tensions through attempting to halt the war in Yemen and revive the nuclear agreement with Iran, it may be essentially to devote Washington's full attention to the challenge posed by China. The diminished US interest and refusal to intervene in the Gulf (save should US strategic interests face a clear and present danger) can be expected to fuel regional contention among Iran, Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Given the last decade of Russia, China and India's increased interest in the Gulf and West Asia, these will likely strive for a foothold in the region - particularly the latter two countries, in view of their dependency on Gulf energy sources.

The United States has historically built its relationship to the Gulf region based on "oil for security". The days throughout the Cold War when America was the world's engine of growth and largest oil importer are over - now that she has become the largest energy producer in the world, thanks to the technology of shale oil and gas production. The Gulf too has seen drastic changes, with 90% of its oil and gas production going to East Asia (now the drivers of global growth) and emerging markets instead of sailing westwards. The change in the global energy production and consumption map has not brought about change in the Gulf states' reliance on the United States for protection, even if the Gulf has pivoted towards Asia to fulfil its economic demands. Indeed, the role of former President Donald Trump's administration in and during the Gulf crisis reflected the geo-economic change in the nature of the relationship that links Washington with the Gulf region. Previously it would not have been possible for the United States to allow such a crisis to occur between its Gulf allies and undermining a region it depended upon for its consumption of energy - it would have prioritized securing the supply lines and stability of the Gulf's producers.

Such changes underline the region's urgent need for the construction of a collective regional security system that establishes mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of regional disputes, possibly along the lines of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The question then is: did the 2021 Gulf reconciliation generate the *mutual trust* required for a *collective and shared vision of the Gulf region's security*, or rather, has the recent concluded crisis simply added a *crisis of confidence on top of a litany of preceding disputes*?

Timetable

Day One

Saturday, 27 November 2021

9:00-9:30	Registration (Main Auditorium)	
9:30-9:45	Opening Remarks (Main Auditorium)	
9:45-11:45	<p>Gulf Reconciliation: the Background and Potential Challenges (1)</p> <p>Chair: Suhaim Al Thani</p> <p>Majed al-Turki: Gulf Reconciliation and Potential Challenges to the Path of Gulf Rapprochement</p> <p>Abdullah al-Shayji: The Incomplete Gulf Reconciliation: Reasons and Repercussions</p> <p>Majed al-Ansari: The Regional Arab Gulf System in the Post Gulf Crisis Period</p> <p>Abdullah al-Ghailani: Gulf Reconciliation: Reading of the Prospects for Regional Security</p>	
11:45-12:00	Coffee Break	
12:00-13:30	<p>Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications (Auditorium 2)</p>	<p>Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies (Main Auditorium)</p>
	<p>The Double Blow of Covid-19 and the Oil shock</p> <p>Chair: Al Jawhara Al-Obaidan</p> <p>Nayef Nazal al-Shammari: The GCC States' Response to Covid-19 and its Economic Implications in light of a Double Blow</p> <p>Ahmed Aref: Social Justice under Covid-19: A Comparative Study of Health and Socio-Economic Policy Responses</p> <p>Tarek ben Hassen: The GCC States after Covid-19: Towards Knowledge Economies in the Post-Oil Era</p>	<p>Gulf Reconciliation: the Background and Potential Challenges (2)</p> <p>Chair: Abdullah Baabood</p> <p>Mohammed Ghanem al-Rumaihi: Prospects for Regional and International Alliances after the Gulf Reconciliation</p> <p>Dhafer al-Ajmi: Gulf "Nose-Greeting" Diplomacy: Full Reconciliation or Temporary Truce?</p> <p>Khalid Al-Jaber: Gulf Reconciliation and International Competition in the Gulf Region</p>
13:30-14:30	Lunch Break	

14:30-16:00	Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications (Auditorium 2)	Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies (Main Auditorium)
	<p>Kuwait's Response to Covid-19 and Its Repercussions</p> <p>Chair: Yacoub Al-Kandari</p> <p>Fahd Yusuf al-Fadala and Mohammed Batwaih: Kuwaiti Public Policy and the Covid-19 Crisis</p> <p>Malak al-Rasheed: Kuwait's response to Covid-19 and its handling of migrant labor</p>	<p>Gulf Reconciliation and Relations with Iran</p> <p>Chair: Faisal Abu Sulaib</p> <p>Mohammed Al-Mesfer: Iran's Regional Policy Following the Gulf Reconciliation and the new Administration in Tehran</p> <p>Robert Mason: Saudi - Iranian Talks: On Track to De-escalation in the Middle East?</p> <p>Mahjoob Zweiri: Iran and the Arab Gulf States: Whither Relations Post the Ula Agreement?</p>
16:00-16:15	Coffee Break	
16:15-17:15	<p>Public Lecture (Main Auditorium)</p> <p>Chair: Khalid Rashid Al-Khater</p> <p>Guy Peters: The GCC Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Actions and Lessons Learned</p>	

- Timing of sessions based on Doha local time (GMT +3)

Day Two

Sunday, 28 November 2021

<p style="text-align: center;">9:00-10:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications (Auditorium 2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies (Main Auditorium)</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">The Omani Response to Covid-19 and its Repercussions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Yousuf Hamed Al Balushi</p> <p>Ashraf Mishrif: Oman's Response to Covid-19: Policies and Implications</p> <p>Mubarak bin Khamis al-Hamdani: Crisis Response in an Unsettled Context: Covid-19 as an Omani Social Reality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Gulf Reconciliation: Relations with Egypt and Competition in the Horn of Africa</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Haider Saeed</p> <p>Hassan Nafaa: Egypt and the Gulf Reconciliation: Prospects and Repercussions</p> <p>Hassan Al-Hajj Ali: Impact of the Gulf Reconciliation on the Rivalry Dynamics in the Horn of Africa</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">10:30-10:45</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Coffee Break</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">10:45-12:15</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Iraq and Yemen's Response to Covid-19 and Its Repercussions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Sadiq Al-Ammari</p> <p>Hasan Latif Kadhim: Iraq and the Covid-19 Crisis: Political Imbalance and Response Failures</p> <p>Salah Yassin Almakhtary: Covid-19: Response and Economic Implications for Yemen</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Impact of the Gulf Reconciliation on Relations with Iraq and Yemen</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Abdul Aziz Al-Hurr</p> <p>Ibrahim Jalal: The GCC Reconciliation: Prospects and Implications for the Conflict in Yemen</p> <p>Firas Elias: Gulf Reconciliation: Prospects and Implications for Relations with Iraq</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">12:15-13:15</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lunch break</p>	

13:15-14:45	<p>Response of the Gulf States to Covid-19: Policies and Implications (Auditorium 2)</p>	<p>Gulf Reconciliation: Implications for the Region and GCC Foreign Policies (Main Auditorium)</p>
	<p>The education sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions</p> <p>Chair: Maryam Al-Khater</p> <p>Auhoud al-Bulushi: The Education Sector in the Arab Gulf States under Covid-19: Response and Future Planning</p> <p>Khawla Mortazawi: The Role of Qatar's Education Sector in Responding to the Covid-19 Challenge: a Case Study of Qatar University</p>	<p>The Repercussions of the Gulf Reconciliation on GCC Regional Relations</p> <p>Chair: Abdulaziz Al Ishaq</p> <p>Bülent Aras: Turkey and the GCC states after the Ula summit</p> <p>Emad Y. Kaddorah: India's Policy Towards the Gulf Crisis</p> <p>Mohammed Cherkaoui: Opportunities to encourage Gulf reconciliation in the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan</p>

- Timing of sessions based on Doha local time (GMT +3)

Participants

Abstracts



Abdullah al-Ghailani

Researcher in strategic studies. He has published many books, studies and research papers in several Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently the book, *Gulf Regional Security: Defining the Concept and Building Capacity*. He is a regular commentator on Arab satellite channels concerning developments in the Arab Gulf region. His interests include Islamic political thought, US foreign policy and Gulf strategic affairs.

Gulf Reconciliation: Reading of the Prospects for Regional Security

This paper discusses the reasons behind the Gulf reconciliation, which constitutes the major achievement of the GCC summit held in al-Ula, Saudi Arabia. On this occasion, the Gulf reconciliation turned the page on an inflamed situation of enmity that lasted for three and a half years (June 2017–December 2020), the Ula summit marks a singular achievement. The most recent inter-Gulf dispute was unlike those previously witnessed by the GCC, with exceptional new measures taken. Gulf-Gulf relations had not seen such a severe and deep split as that produced by the blockade imposed against Qatar. The Gulf states resorted to new means to manage internal disputes and Gulf public opinion became polarized and outraged like never before. This paper focuses on answering the following questions: Does the Gulf reconciliation restore diplomatic cohesiveness towards regional crises? Is the atmosphere favorable to forge a common conceptual perception of Gulf security? After this fragmentation, will the GCC combine strengths to form a strong security umbrella? How will the reconciliation be reflected in the approaches of Gulf states to regional crises and relations? The paper argues that the repercussions of the Gulf crisis are not only limited to internal political, economic and social divides, but extend to the regional level, and have therefore caused a redefinition of concepts of collective security. The Arab Gulf states have begun to reposition themselves geo-strategically with respect to regional and international crises and relations.



Abdullah al-Shayji

Professor of International Relations at Kuwait University, he obtained his PhD in the philosophy of political science from the University of Texas, Austin. He was head of the Political Science Department at Kuwait University and has published many books, studies and research papers in a number of Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently the book *GCC Crises: Roots, Causes, Mediations, Future Scenarios* (2011–2018), Al-Dar Al-Arabiya lil-Ulum Nashirun, 2018 (in Arabic).

The Incomplete Gulf Reconciliation: Reasons and Repercussions

The Gulf crisis that rocked the GCC on 5 June 2017, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Arab Naksa (setback) in the June 1967 war, constituted a new Arab naksa, and a painful blow to the core of joint Arab action. This paper names the Gulf naksa as a defining moment in joint Gulf action, which destabilized the GCC when four countries, three of which were founding members of the GCC; Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, joined by Egypt, joined up against the small state of Qatar. Their imposition of a naval, land and air blockade and a complete boycott, established a new power struggle, affecting two-thirds of the GCC states. Kuwait and Oman remained neutral and played an intermediary role, using conflict resolution and mediation diplomacy to bridge the rift. This paper discusses the reasons behind the outbreak of the Gulf crisis and failure of Kuwaiti and US mediation, the absence of a rational approach in dealing with the crisis, the impact of the Trump administration's bias, and paralyzing US foreign policy. It also discusses the reasons the US position changed, and the success of Kuwaiti mediation following Trump's defeat in the US presidential elections. Finally, it argues that Gulf reconciliation still faces several challenges that could have repercussions on joint Gulf action and Gulf security in dealing with overlapping threats and challenges. These challenges expand as the US presence declines in the Arab region, along with the lack of confidence US protection, and fears of a repeat of former US President Obama's dealings with Iran on order to prevent it from turning into a nuclear state.



Ahmed Aref

Public Policy Researcher at the Doha International Family Institute and a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, he previously worked at the Cairo regional office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). His research interests focus on public policy analysis in the Arab region with an emphasis on Gulf studies. He has published many studies, policy papers and reports in peer-reviewed academic journals, most recently: "Austerity for the Poor and Prosperity for the Rich: With fragile social protection systems in the Arab world, people have constructed their own resilience mechanisms for survival," *Fair Observer*, University of Bath, 2021.

Social Justice under Covid-19: a Comparative Study of Health and Socio-Economic Policy Responses

This paper observes the markedly different policy responses in the Arab Mashreq and the Arab Gulf. In the Mashreq, the economic response favoured support for large companies and businessmen, while similar resources were not injected into small and medium industries, which were the major losers in the pandemic. There was also no change in social protection policies, an area which saw almost no policy response even though poor and vulnerable groups should have been a priority in such a crisis. The same classism was present in the more urgent response in health policies since high quality treatment was only available to the better-off. Vaccination, especially early on, also became a class-based entitlement, and there were few efforts to rapidly boost the broad and fragile health sector for the poor. In the Arab Gulf, this disparity in the policy responses in the health sector did not exist, since in general the Gulf countries provided high-quality health care to all and were quick to offer free vaccination for all residents. Some Gulf states went further and for made vaccination a condition of employment for some fields. The policy responses in terms of economic support were comprehensive and did not exclude small and medium enterprises. However, there was also a package of austerity measures that undermined the philosophy of social justice in the Gulf response, since these measures were directed mainly against expatriate workers, whose numbers, pay, and privileges were all reduced.



Ashraf Mishrif

Research Chair for Economic Studies at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. Previously Associate Professor at King's College London. He has published many books, studies, and research papers in several Arab and international peer-reviewed journals, most recently: *Economic Diversification in the Gulf Region*, 2 vols, Palgrave Macmillan (2018).

Oman's Response to Covid-19: Policies and Implications

This paper explains and analyzes the main policies adopted by the Omani government to deal with the consequences of the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, since its outbreak in Oman on February 24, 2020. To begin with, the paper reviews and assesses the government's attitude toward the health, human and economic risks arising from such pandemics. It notes the speed with which it appointed a Higher Committee to monitor the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. Next, the paper analyzes the most important preventative measures and their effectiveness in helping to limit the spread of the virus and minimize the economic, financial, social and human losses. This is presented in the theoretical and conceptual context of health economics, which clarify the impact of Covid-19 on societies and transformations within the economic and social systems. The study uses a descriptive analytical method in interpreting the phenomenon with recourse to quantitative and qualitative research tools for gathering and analyzing primary data from a monitoring survey and interviews with relevant officials at government ministries and agencies. The study is applied to Omani companies that were affected by the pandemic. The statistical software package SPSS is used for the quantitative analysis and the NVivo program for qualitative analysis of the interviews. The applied research focuses on an analysis of the impact of fiscal policies on the financial and monetary situation in Oman as a result of the fall in demand for oil and the decline in its revenues for the state public treasury. It also highlights what the sustainable financial plan (2020-2024) might achieve in dealing with the pandemic implications. The study further assesses the impact of public health policies and the various financial stimulus packages that the government proposed on the ability of companies to resume their economic activities. This is through analysis of samples of companies to calculate the effect of these measures on their financial, operational and human-resource capacities. The study concludes its analysis with a summary of the main results and proposals to be submitted to decision-makers.



Auhoud al-Bulushi

Omani academic and researcher, she is head of the Research and Studies Department at the Omani Studies Center at Sultan Qaboos University. She gained her PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Warwick, UK and has published many studies, policy papers and reports in peer-reviewed academic journals on women's issues in the Arab Gulf region and on education.

The Education Sector in the Arab Gulf States under Covid-19: Response and Future Planning

The Covid-19 pandemic succeeded in drawing the attention of officials in states around the world to domestic conditions. The pandemic's impact encompassed all aspects of life in the health, economic, educational and social sectors. Since the experience was new at every level, the speed and nature of responses to meet the challenges and balance the political, economic and social repercussions varied. For the Gulf states, whose economies are based on oil, the reverberations of the Covid-19 pandemic proved greater because it coincided with an unprecedented collapse in world oil prices. This paper focuses on the education sector in the Arab Gulf states under Covid-19 through a comparison of their responses and a discussion of the main challenges the sector has faced during the crisis. It also examines the opportunities created to develop education and take advantage of new technologies to restructure education, its mechanisms, and the roles played by stakeholders in the educational process. This paper argues that the education sector played a leadership role in the frontline against the current crisis on the family, professional and societal levels. It also played a major role in working to contain the repercussions of Covid-19 in the Arab Gulf states.



B. Guy Peters

Maurice Falk Professor of American Government at the University of Pittsburgh, United States and editor of *The International Review of Public Policy (IRPP)*. He has published many books, studies and policy papers in peer-reviewed journals, most recently *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012); *Democratic Backsliding and Public Administration: How Populists in Government Transform State Bureaucracies* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); and *Administrative Traditions: Understanding the Roots of Contemporary Administrative Behavior* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

The GCC States' Response to Covid-19: Measures and Lessons Learned

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed major challenges to all countries, and the same applies to the Arab Gulf states. There have been both merits and shortcomings in the Gulf states' handling of the pandemic. These countries are relatively wealthy, but much of this wealth derives from oil and gas revenues, the prices of which dropped significantly during the pandemic because of mobility restrictions imposed on movement around the world to halt the spread of the virus. This paper discusses Gulf states' response to the pandemic and highlights their similarities and differences. The paper also compares their response with that of the rest of the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere. Although the Gulf countries were able to achieve high levels of vaccination coverage, questions remain about other aspects of the pandemic management. These aspects must be addressed in case of new waves of the pandemic or the outbreak of future epidemics. The final part of the paper focuses on lessons learned or to be learned. The outbreak of Covid-19 was a unique event, but other unknown epidemics are expected in future. Will the governments of these countries be more prepared for the next pandemic? What must be taken into consideration when planning future public health programs, even as the current pandemic continues to grip most parts of the world?



Bülent Aras

Opinion polling expert and Visiting Professor in International Relations at Qatar University. Former Professor of International Relations at the School of Advanced International Relations Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University and Advisor to international organizations such as Oxford Analytica, Human Rights Watch, and the International Center for Black Sea Studies. He has written many books and studies and published research papers in many international peer-reviewed journals, including *Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey*, (Novascience, 1998); *New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey's Position*, Frank Cass, 2002; *Turkey and the Greater Middle East*, (TASAM, 2004); and *Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region*, (Praeger, 1999).

Turkey and the GCC states after the Ula summit

This paper explores the implications of Gulf reconciliation for Turkish policy towards the region. It discusses the interactions between Turkey and the Gulf countries within this dynamic situation, which may well restructure the forms of regional rivalry rather than causing them to vanish. The paper argues that the end of the diplomatic dispute in general was seen as a display of good intentions to the then incoming Biden administration and a sign of Saudi willingness to cooperate in confronting the joint threats of Iran. The paper proposes that this step came following several Saudi initiatives to recast the image of Saudi crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman as a partner with greater loyalty to US interests, including the prince's personal project to found an eco-friendly city. Even so, the dynamics existing prior to the crisis have largely disappeared and defining the Iranian threat may not guarantee Gulf unity today. In the absence of a more consensual resolution to the dispute, one which will ultimately bring all parties to a permanent solution, there are three factors that might reopen the disagreement with Qatar. As a result, the paper suggests that the Ula declaration must be read as a first, incomplete step towards Gulf reconciliation, since the restoration of stability and security requires broader steps such as constructive dialogue and not just with Turkey and Iran but also with other stakeholders, such as China, Russia and the EU.



Dhafer al-Ajmi

Executive Director of the Gulf Monitoring Group and a retired Colonel in the Kuwaiti Airforce. He gained a PhD in Arab Gulf security and has published many books, studies and research papers in a number of Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently: "Arab Gulf Security: Evolution and Problems from the Perspective of Regional and International Relations" (2011) (in Arabic); "History of the Kuwaiti Army" (2004 and 2011) (in Arabic); and "The Kuwaiti Army in the Age of Mubarak al-Sabah 1896–1915" 2000 (in Arabic).

Gulf "Nose-Greeting" Diplomacy: Full Reconciliation or Temporary Truce?

This paper discusses the diplomatic efforts made in the past few years in the Arab Gulf to resolve the region's crises that do not fit with changing regional conditions and in which players are using unconventional methods to manage international interactions and conflicts and regional disputes. This situation has made it difficult for modern diplomacy to confront these changes. In this light, "nose-greeting" diplomacy has come to the fore as a traditional form of diplomacy foregrounding the patriarchal system in the Gulf region. It is a kind of diplomacy that counts less on adherence to the letter of agreements and more on human trust and tolerance. In this emotional diplomacy, one Gulf nose touching another is enough to mark an apology or meet approval and restore one as a noble Arab person with esteem for what you have done. Therefore, this paper argues that this form of diplomacy, while contributing to finding provisional solutions to the crises of the Arab Gulf region, has neglected to find radical permanent solutions to the crises.



Emad Y. Kaddorah

Researcher and Head of the Editing Department at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He holds a PhD in International Relations and Middle East Studies. He has published many books and peer-reviewed articles, including "The Geopolitical Significance of the Gulf in India's Strategy," *Siyasat Arabia*, no. 44 (2020); *Turkish Foreign Policy: Orientations, Flexible Alliances, Power Politics* (Doha/Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021); *The Rise of the GCC States and Turkey: Convergent and Divergent Regional Agendas* (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021).

India's Policy Towards the Gulf Crisis

India adopted a cautious policy towards the GCC states during the emergence of differences such as the Gulf crisis of 2017-2021. Despite the focus of Narendra Modi's government on proactive diplomacy and engagement abroad, it has reverted to the principle of non-alignment and neutrality in dealing with the crisis, considering the conflict an internal affair and calling for resolution through dialogue. India did not mediate through concrete steps to resolve the dispute, nor by diplomatic pursuit and repeated visits during the escalation. Furthermore, the depth of historical interdependence, geographic proximity and intertwining of economic interests mean that these states are India's most important trading partners and are home to the largest overseas Indian community. The economic interests are a priority, given the need for foreign investments and energy resources. The distribution of the Indian communities in these countries also led to the cautious policy in order to preserve their social and economic interests as well as their huge financial remittances to India. Moreover, because competing countries such as China and Pakistan have remained neutral, India has not been encouraged to take an active role in solving the conflict. The key US role, especially through supporting Kuwait's mediation, encouraged New Delhi to remain neutral, taking advantage of Washington's efforts and its influence in securing energy routes. Nevertheless, India took an active role in providing Qatar with essential products during the crisis. The paper seeks to understand the shifts in Indian foreign policy between non-alignment and proactive diplomacy. It examines India's policy during the Gulf crisis and discusses the factors affecting it.



Fahd Yusuf al-Fadala

Consultant at the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait. He was head of the Education Department at the Arab Open University in Kuwait. He has published many books, studies, and research papers in a number of international and Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently, "Kuwait's Domestic and Foreign Policy: a Reading of the Political Discourse of the Late Emir His Excellency Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah", *Gulf and Arabian Studies Center*, 2021 (in Arabic); and "Human Resources and the Knowledge Economy: a Pioneering Role for Fostering and Investing in Talent", *Kuwaiti Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences*, 2021 (in Arabic).

Kuwaiti Public Policy Responses to Address the Implications of the Covid-19 Crisis

This paper discusses public policy responses in Kuwait to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, with a focus on the political discourse of senior decision-making circles on the crisis, the public policy adopted by Kuwait for planning and confronting the pandemic, the executive procedures implemented by ministries and government agencies to deal with the economic fallout and the contribution of stakeholders to mitigate the crisis. The paper argues that Kuwait implemented public policy in line with a flexible strategy that took advantage of many modern strategies for dealing with the pandemic. There was clear coordination between ministries and government departments and agencies. The political discourse of senior decision-making circles helped mitigate the severity of the crisis. Kuwait undertook many effective measures to lessen the severity of the pandemic's consequences through cooperation, coordination and agreement among governmental bodies and community initiatives.



Firas Elias

Iraqi researcher who has written many books and studies and published research papers in a number of international and Arab peer-reviewed journals, including "The Centrality of Iraq in the Iranian Strategic Mentality," International Institute for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 2018 (in Arabic); and "Analysis of Iranian Foreign Policy in the Period after the Islamic Revolution According to the Umm al-Qura Theory", Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies, Ankara, vol. 5, 2021 (in Arabic). His contributions on international websites include "The Rise of the Taliban and Iran's Critical Problem in Afghanistan", the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 2021.

Gulf Rconciliation: Prospects and Implications for Relations with Iraq

This paper builds on the premise that the Gulf crisis has produced a complex strategic environment in which the local, regional and international factors interact. This fact has in turn reformulated the policy of axes and regional balances in a context that caused a major breach to the Gulf security system and made it difficult to control the tempo of Gulf policy in accord with the interparty Gulf reconciliation. In light of this, the paper discusses the position of Iraq as one of the states with an important position in the crisis and was keen to adopt a balanced policy towards it. It thus played an important role in enabling Gulf reconciliation and making good use of its results for Iraq. This has raised an important problem: how can Iraq maintain the progress in Gulf reconciliation and add strategic momentum to it, so as to restore unified Gulf concern for Iraq in a direction that supports Iraq's economic, energy and security reality? The paper argues that Iraq's stance towards the Gulf crisis and the reconciliation that followed is clear in its openness to all the Arab Gulf states. In light of this, the future and horizon of Gulf reconciliation and its implications for relations with Iraq are a significant question for Iraq and its regional relations, which are currently facing many complex strategic challenges.



Hasan Latif Kadhim

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Iraq and the Covid-19 Crisis: Political Imbalance and Response Failures

The economic and financial impact of the pandemic varied from country to country according to the measures and policies adopted to curb it. Likewise, the channels of influence varied according to the nature and fragility of the economy. This paper focuses on the Iraqi economy, which was affected by the Covid-19 outbreak early on because of its excessive dependence on the oil sector and its revenues. That sector was heavily affected from the early stages of the pandemic outbreak and continues to suffer from complex problems including, a growing fiscal deficit, negative economic growth, high unemployment rate, rising poverty rates, and the pandemic recession. Given these conditions, an expansionary policy with fiscal discipline should have been adopted. That is, spending should have been directed to investment and operating costs restricted to guaranteeing salaries and providing basic services of appropriate quality. This paper discusses the poor governance in confronting the serious challenges posed by the crisis and the implications for the Iraqi economy, which are placing additional and unbearable burdens on Iraqi citizens at a time when the consequences of the pandemic recession are growing and could worsen in the absence of suitably conscious policies to meet the challenges. The compound crisis has threatened the development gains achieved during the previous twenty years, and some indices have returned to their levels on the eve of the political changes of 2003. The Iraqi experience suggests regaining ground will be difficult.



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Impact of the Gulf Reconciliation on the Rivalry Dynamics in the Horn of Africa

The Gulf reconciliation has had a notable impact on the dynamics of the Horn of Africa, an effect amplified by the changes to US policy towards the Arab region following the election of Joe Biden as president. The new US administration expressed its desire to end a number of crises in the region, including the war in Yemen, the turmoil in Libya, and its withdrawal from Afghanistan. This paper looks at the impact of the Gulf reconciliation on the rivalry between the Gulf states over the Horn of Africa. The paper holds that despite the general waning of the intense interest in the Horn of Africa, the effects of the Gulf reconciliation will be felt there. There is concern about military issues and a turnaround on the drive to establish Gulf military facilities in the region, while political and economic issues remain stable. For example, the UAE has reduced its military presence in the region, withdrawn from the bases it set up in the Eritrean port of Massawa, and has not proceeded to build a planned base in the Northern Somali city of Berbera. The UAE has, however, been accused of backing the government of Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia by providing drones in the conflict against Tigray. Saudi Arabia has abandoned plans to build a military facility in Djibouti. In both Sudan and Somalia, the Gulf reconciliation has had an important effect on the relations of political forces with the Gulf states.



Hassan Nafaa

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Egypt and the Gulf Reconciliation: Prospects and Repercussions

This paper explores the prospects and repercussions of the Gulf reconciliation for Egypt's relations with the Arab Gulf states, whether on the bilateral level (with individual parties involved in the blockade of Qatar) or on the collective level (with the GCC as the institutional framework binding member states). Because Egypt is not a member of this sub-regional system, it could have been assumed that the country would distance itself from a crisis that some saw as only concerning the GCC and so should be handled within that framework in the first place. However, Egypt's engagement as a party to the crisis added new geo-political dimensions to the matter and provoked many guesses about its real motivations and predictions. Also noteworthy are the unilateral moves by Saudi Arabia in leading the efforts to achieve reconciliation between the parties to the crisis. These efforts built momentum to end the boycott and blockade of Qatar. Egypt's initial reluctance to join in these efforts prompted many analyses and forecasts on the true center of gravity of the Arab regional order at the present stage, and regarding the potential impact of Gulf reconciliation on power balances in the Arab and Gulf regional systems. This paper is thus divided into five main sections: the reasons for Egypt's involvement; management of the crisis; the Egyptian position on the Saudi reconciliation initiative; the possible effects of the reconciliation on Egypt's relations with the GCC states; and, finally, predictions for the potential repercussions of the reconciliation on the performance and effectiveness of the Arab regional order.



Ibrahim Jalal

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The GCC Reconciliation: Prospects and Implications for the Conflict in Yemen

This paper explores the prospects of rapprochement between the GCC states following the al-Ula summit and the repercussions of this event on conflict and peace in Yemen. The paper argues that despite the Ula summit having ended the split among the GCC states (the blockade of Qatar), the internal drivers of the crisis are still far from being addressed. It is therefore unlikely that rivalry among the GCC states will end, and the implications of this situation on Yemen are still in play. Over the past decade, the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, have given clear signals of the differences in their foreign policy aims in Yemen. Through an examination of these three states' foreign policy towards Yemen concerning three key events – the Arab Spring, the military intervention implemented through the Arab coalition, and the blockade of Qatar – it becomes clear that the Ula summit means much more to key stakeholders than it does to Yemen, and it is highly likely that the summit's repercussions on Yemen will be secondary, indirect and long term.



Khalid Al-Jaber

Director of the Middle East North Africa Center in Washington, DC. He holds a PhD from the UK and a master's degree from the US. He previously worked at the Al-Sharq Center for Studies and Research and served as editor-in-chief of the English language newspaper *The Peninsula*. As a researcher in Arab and Gulf Studies, he focuses on political science, public diplomacy, international communications and international relations. He has published his research in many academic books and specialized journals, including the *Encyclopedia of the World Press*, *Sage* and the *Official Gazette*.

Gulf Reconciliation and International Competition in the Gulf Region

The end of the Gulf crisis (2017-2021) turned a new page on the political scene in the Middle East. The arrival of the new US President, Democrat Joe Biden, departed from the approach of the previous administration in regional policy, requiring leaders in the region to change the political patterns that characterised their treatment of domestic and foreign issues. New reviews, settlements, understandings and practices were needed to meet the challenges arising from regional and international contexts. This paper argues that the Gulf region has once again raised questions about the extent the US can be relied upon for defence provisions, especially given the decline in the strategic importance of the region as a result of increased energy production and diversification in the global energy market. The US President's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan had serious consequences for US credibility and undermined his commitment to the Middle East and the Gulf in particular. The paper argues that the new reality has deepened the impression among the Gulf states that they can no longer count on the United States to defend their security and that the US role in the region is witnessing a dramatic decline. For some countries of the region, regional alliances and arrangements such as the Abraham accords aim to offset the gradual decline of the Middle East. The paper also argues that the US withdrawal may change the balance of power in the Middle East, especially with the re-emergence of Russia as a strategic competitor, and China imposing itself as a strong and active opponent of the United States. This may push the Gulf states to search for a new political, economic and security equation to meet the upcoming challenges.



Khawla Mortazawi

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The Role of Qatar's Education Sector in Responding to the Covid-19 Challenge: a Case Study of Qatar University

This paper deconstructs the role of the education sector in Qatar in responding to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on the University of Qatar. The research question seeks to define the nature of the latent relationship between the university and its internal and external publics during the pandemic and the extent to which it was able to foster immunity in its educational, administrative and research systems. This was based on the successive challenges and constraints posed by the pandemic, which radically changed the course of these systems. In addition, the paper focuses on the media and communications dimension, specifically the role and importance of crisis communications in delineating and evaluating the pandemic landscape and its relationship with the university's activities and goals. Another dimension to be tackled, is that of services as represented by the extent to which the internal public of the university (students, faculty and administration) and external public (local public opinion) benefitted from the results of the strategies and measures drawn up by Qatar University to respond to the challenges and changing demands of the pandemic. The paper argues that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulty of controlling it despite all at the efforts made by states and health bodies through their advanced or modest capabilities, has revealed the importance of the role of crisis communications in the education sector, taken as the main means for governmental and private institutions and organizations to protect and preserve life, overcome the fallout of the global pandemic and try to minimize threats and risks arising during and after the crisis.



Mahjoob Zweiri

Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University. He previously worked at the Iranian Studies Center, Durham University. He has published many books, studies and research papers in several international and Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently, *Contemporary Qatar: Examining State and Society*, (Springer, 2021); *The 2017 Gulf Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Springer, 2021); "U.S.–Iranian Relations under the Donald Trump Administration: Interactions and Consequences), *Siyasat Arabiya*, 2021 (in Arabic); and "The Arabs and Iranians: What Went Wrong? And Why?" *Sociology of Islam*, 2020.

Iran and the Arab Gulf States: Whither Relations Post the Ula Agreement?

The Ula agreement between the Gulf states signed in January 2020 marked an end to the Gulf crisis and the blockade on Qatar. Relations gradually resumed between Qatar and the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The agreement was met with a warm international and regional welcome, especially by Turkey and Iran. Since its onset, Iran had responded the crisis and played a role in mitigating the effects of the siege imposed on Qatar by opening its airspace to flights to and from Qatar. In light of this, this study examines and assesses the Iranian position and response to the Ula agreement, particularly as this agreement came at an important transitional moment for the region with a new US administration under President Joe Biden and Iran preparing for presidential elections. Regional developments, such as the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover, US repositioning in Iraq, and the Saudi–Iranian dialogue were also significant. This study focuses on these interactions and others, in which Iran and the Gulf states, or some of them, were present to observe the Iranian position and its influence, even if temporary, in the Ula agreement.



Majed al-Ansari

Head of the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies, Chairman of the board of the Qatar Center for Journalism, and a member the board of trustees of the Strategic Studies Center of the Qatari Armed Forces. He was a Professor of Political Sociology at Qatar University and headed the politics department at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute. He gained his MA and PhD in social change from Manchester University with a dissertation titled, "A Minority of Citizens: the Influence of Religious, Societal and Political Values on Trust in Foreigners in Qatar."

The Regional Arab Gulf System in the Post Gulf Crisis Period

Ongoing deep regional challenges in the Middle East have raised political and security fears to new heights within the GCC over recent years. Three conflicting perspectives over how to deal with regional and international issues have collided, leading to damaging results for the region. In turn, divides in the Arab political scene led to attempts to impose Arab unity that proved a failure, which caused further division and destabilized the regional system. This paper outlines the background to the 2017 Gulf crisis in the broader context of the Arab Spring and analyzes subsequent mediation attempts, the US role in the region, political developments in Kuwait and Oman, normalization practices with Israel, and the solution to the Gulf crisis through a study of the various political roles of the active parties. The paper uses the analytical assumptions of critical political geography to understand how policymakers form their ideas and understand the region and their political choices in choosing allies and enemies. Gulf and Arab normalization with Israel shed light on the discussion as case studies.



Majed al-Turki

Head of the Center for Media and Arab-Russian Studies, Riyadh. He is a member of the board of the National Center for Youth Studies, the permanent general secretariat of the World Congress of Religious Leaders in Kazakhstan and the Saudi Association for Communication and Media. He has written widely in peer-reviewed academic journals on Saudi-Soviet relations.

Gulf Reconciliation and Potential Challenges to the Path of Gulf Rapprochement

This paper discusses the potential challenges to Gulf reconciliation. Since the Gulf crisis broke in June 2017, a range of alliances emerged outside the framework of the Gulf system, whether at the level of interrelations among the GCC states or at the level of relations with regional players, especially Iran, Turkey and Israel. This paper indicates that this confluence, either on the Gulf or regional level, may impact on the security and stability of the Gulf region. This demands a discussion of the post-reconciliation phase and what this may entail in an attempt to give a practical perception of how to address them. To understand this, the paper focuses on the trends and course of Gulf reconciliation, the new regional alliances that emerged during the Gulf crisis, the new potential political challenges, particularly normalization with Israel, and potential security and military challenges, particularly the spread of regional military bases in the Gulf.



Malak al-Rasheed

Associate Professor of Social Work at Kuwait University and currently Visiting Professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, United States for 2021–22. Previously, she worked at the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and headed the Gulf–Europe Studies and Gulf–America Studies Units. She has published many studies and research papers in international and Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently, "Resilience-based intervention for youth: An initial investigation of school social work program in Kuwait," *International Social Work*, 2021.

Kuwait's response to Covid-19 and its handling of migrant labor

Kuwait was one of the first countries to record cases of Covid-19 in the Arab Gulf region, with transmission from Iran. The Kuwaiti government was forced to take major emergency measures to stop and contain the spread of the virus. These measures included border closures, travel bans, public lockdowns (schools, workplaces, places of worship, shopping malls), imposing partial and full curfews, and isolating areas designated infection hotspots. The government also organized evacuation for around 30,000 Kuwaitis stuck abroad, which represented the largest repatriation operation in the country's history. Among the many problems and challenges that resulted from the measures to fight the pandemic, or to be more accurate, that have been exacerbated and came to the surface, were the problems of dealing with the migrant labor force during the covid outbreak. This paper discusses the level of satisfaction with the state's measures that dealt with migrant labour during the pandemic and the level of migrant worker trust in the government's approach. It also considers the handling of media campaigns on social media or news channels. The paper thus attempts to deconstruct the Kuwaiti response to the Covid-19 outbreak through an investigation of how it dealt with migrant labor.



Mohammed Al-Mesfer

Retired Professor at the University of Qatar, he obtained his PhD in political science from New York State University in 1984. He has been a Qatari diplomat and has published many books, studies and research papers in a number of Arab peer-reviewed journals, most recently *International Organizations: History, Politics, Economy, Law, Administration*, (Qatar University Press, 2021) (in Arabic); and *Gulf-Gulf relations: the dilemma of a strategic vacuum and fragmentation (1971–2018)*], (Al-Jazeera Studies Center, 2018) (in Arabic). He contributes regularly to the Qatari and Arab press.

Iran's Regional Policy Following the Gulf Reconciliation and Administration Change in Tehran

This paper analyzes Iranian regional policy under the new administration, which is expected to maintain the existing regional approach, and looks at the potential for regional jostling between Iran and the GCC states over several common interests following the Gulf reconciliation. On 5 August 2021, the new Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi entered his office on Pasteur Street in Tehran. He belongs to the conservative trend, in contrast to his reformist predecessor Hassan Rouhani. Raisi is the Islamic Republic of Iran's eighth president since 1979. To understand the nature of Iranian policy post-Gulf reconciliation, the paper focuses on the situation surrounding the inauguration of the new administration, since Iran is facing two crises in its foreign relations. The first concerns the tensions and crises with states in the regional neighborhood, while the second is related to international relations with the West, particularly the United States. Two schools of Iranian foreign policy are vying with each other. The first is the regional doctrine, which sees the regional level as the starting point for foreign policy, and that resolving issues with neighbouring states and regional rivals strengthens Iran's position in dealing with Western states. This doctrine believes that the regional gateway is necessary for dealing with foreign disagreements and holds out hope for increasing Iran's sources of strength towards the superpowers. Raisi is considered a follower of this school of thought. The second doctrine holds that solving Iran's problems starts with the Western powers, especially the United States, because this necessarily reflects positively on regional relations. Internationally, Iran is struggling under harsh sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies mainly because of its nuclear and missile programs and because of its defiance policies regionally and internationally, which have deepened Iran's economic, social and health crises.



Mohammed Batwaih

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Kuwaiti Public Policy Responses to Address the Implications of the Covid-19 Crisis

This paper discusses public policy responses in Kuwait to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, with a focus on the political discourse of senior decision-making circles on the crisis, the public policy adopted by Kuwait for planning and confronting the pandemic, the executive procedures implemented by ministries and government agencies to deal with the economic fallout and the contribution of stakeholders to mitigate the crisis. The paper argues that Kuwait implemented public policy in line with a flexible strategy that took advantage of many modern strategies for dealing with the pandemic. There was clear coordination between ministries and government departments and agencies. The political discourse of senior decision-making circles helped mitigate the severity of the crisis. Kuwait undertook many effective measures to lessen the severity of the pandemic's consequences through cooperation, coordination and agreement among governmental bodies and community initiatives.



Mohammed Cherkaoui

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Opportunities to encourage Gulf reconciliation in the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan

Dismantling Gulf-US relations, before, during and after the Gulf crisis, the paper posits that there has been a 180-degree circular paradox in the US strategy toward the Gulf states between early June 2017, when the Trump administration sought to link Qatar with support for Terrorism and the regional destabilization, and mid-November 2021, when the Biden administration chose to place the care of US interests in Afghanistan in the custody of the Qatari embassy in Kabul. Consequently, the paper comparatively assesses the development of the US-Qatari partnership during the previous and current US administration. It also discusses President Biden's disappointment with Saudi Arabia due to the latter's agreement with Russia after raising daily production to 400,000 barrels of oil per day, which has increased White House concerns about the increase in inflation as oil prices rise to their highest level in the past seven years. Furthermore, the paper discusses the emerging voices in Washington that seek to reconsider relations with the UAE and conduct a critical assessment of its allies in the Gulf. Finally, the paper presents a forecast for change in the Gulf states' strategies, and their need for repositioning within a comprehensive reconciliation according to each country's new balances regarding international politics and in the assessments of Washington and other Western capitals.



Mohammed Ghanem al-Rumaihi

Professor of Political Sociology in the Sociology and Social Work Department at Kuwait University. He has held many positions at that university, most recently director of the the Center for the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula Studies (2016–17). He has also been a consultant to the *Alam al-Maarifa* series published by the Kuwaiti National Council for Culture and was editor-in-chief at *Al-Arabi* magazine and daily newspapers such as *Sawt Al-Kuwait* and *Awan*. He has been awarded many cultural prizes and published many books, studies, and research papers in a number of Arab peer-reviewed journals on Gulf societies and Arab culture in English and Arabic.

Prospects for Regional and International Alliances after the Gulf Reconciliation

This paper discusses the changing positioning of the Arab Gulf region in global politics with a focus on the political, security, military and economic priorities of superpowers regarding the states of the region and the impact of this on the formation of new regional and international alliances. The paper also discusses the international conflict between the superpowers, particularly competition among the United States, China and Russia and the position of the Gulf states in their future strategies. There is also a focus on the decline of the importance of oil for these states, the decline in the strategic position of the region following technological development, and the great cost of military and security engagement in the region while the hoped-for gains from such involvement in regional conflicts have declined. The paper also discusses the position of the Arab Gulf states in the context of Iranian hegemony in four Arab states: Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and the effect of this on Gulf regional security. Furthermore, it addresses the potential losses from the continuation of conflicts between states in the Arab Gulf region given the regional and international competition over it. Finally, it looks at the internal situation of the Gulf states and the effect of delayed political, economic and social reform to the strategic position of the Arab Gulf states in the region.



Mubarak bin Khamis al-Hamdani

Social researcher at the Omani Consultative Council (Majlis Shura). He gained an MA in political sociology with a study of identity and its connection with political transformations. His research interests focus on democracy and democratization in Oman and their relationship with political philosophy and traditional social components. His research activity covers several publications on issues of virtual sociology. He had published many books, studies, and research papers in a number of Arab and international peer-reviewed journals, most recently, "Demographic Change and Social Policy in Oman: a Reading of Population Projections in the Oman Vision 2020", *Istishraf*, 2020 (in Arabic).

Crisis Response in an Unsettled Context: Covid-19 as an Omani Social Reality

As a result of its implications for human communities, the Covid-19 pandemic embodies an opportunity to understand the stratagems devised by communities, inspired by their social and cultural configurations, to deal with the pandemic. By this, we do not mean the limits of compliance and control or departure from those boundaries as much as the symbolic stratagems and emerging community mechanisms to achieve social adaptation to the state of uncertainty imposed by the pandemic. In light of this, the paper focuses on understanding the Covid-19 outbreak in Oman in an unsettled cultural and social context characterized by major political and policy transformations at the governmental level, while simultaneously experiencing difficult economic and living conditions as a result of the slowdown in the shift towards a diversified economy, the fall in oil prices, shortage of jobs, rise in unemployment rates, poor productivity in the public sector, and worsening labor conditions for workers in the various production sectors. Thus, the pandemic has put an additional burden on social actors in a country already experiencing existing conditions of uncertainty. In this regard, the paper addresses the issue of how actors in Oman have adapted to the various implications of Covid-19. Through knowledge of this adaptation, the paper deals with two important dimensions: first, the extent of the spread of pandemic information and rumors in Oman and the effect of this on the official organizational response to the pandemic; and second, the extent to which the official communication system for pandemic management paid attention to the cultural and social context in its planning and orientation towards social actors.



Nayef Nazal al-Shammari

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The GCC States' Response to Covid-19 and its Economic Implications in light of a Double Blow

There are many dimensions to the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic for the world's economies. Social and economic activities came to a halt and many workers lost their jobs; borders were closed; industry was paralyzed; business activities suspended, and all of this resulted in a severe contraction in GDP for many economies, including those of the GCC states. The GCC states were not unique in responding with financial packages to mitigate these negative effects on the economy, and the extent of financial support to boost economy sectors varied from country to country. This paper analyzes the negative implications of Covid-19 for the economies of the GCC states, given that they experienced a double blow: the outbreak of the pandemic and a simultaneous drop in global oil prices to an unprecedented low since the world economy came to rely on oil. The paper then assesses the ability of these states to mitigate these negative effects and sheds light on future challenges related to the changes brought about by these implications for the global economy and their impact on the GCC states. Finally, there are some recommendations and lessons to be learned.



Robert Mason

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Saudi - Iranian Talks: On Track to De-escalation in the Middle East?

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE, followed by Egypt, restored diplomatic relations with Qatar following an announcement during the GCC summit in al-Ula on 5 January 2020. This move was shepherded by Saudi Arabia, notably after the election of US President Joe Biden in an effort to deflect expected US political pressure. Since then, the Biden administration has suspended arms sales to Saudi Arabia, resumed talks with Iran over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and opted not to take part in the "eternal wars" in the Middle East. This paper discusses the results of the meetings between the UAE and Iran, which were followed by meetings attended by officials from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Iran, and then in April meetings between Saudi Arabia and Iran with a focus on the possibility of de-escalation in the Gulf region and beyond. Nonetheless, this paper argues that in the context of ongoing Gulf rivalries, regional unrest, ingrained hatred between the United States and Iran, and uncertainties about US diplomacy, the possibilities of halting escalation in the Gulf and the wider Middle East are slim. This paper uses an analytical framework that focuses on complex realistic assumptions such as the concentration of power, decision making, regime security and the overall balance across the local, regional and international environments in order to understand the nature and prospects of these talks.



Salah Yassin Almaktary

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Covid-19: Response and Economic Implications for Yemen

As the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic took hold worldwide, the first wave in Yemen was still coming to an end. The second wave there struck in February 2021 and the third in August 2021, in sync with the third and fourth global waves. Although the "legitimate" government and the "salvation" government largely took the same measures during the first wave, their responses varied in the second and third waves. The legitimate government took fewer measures in the second wave and none at all in the third, apart from vaccine distribution. Meanwhile, the salvation government ignored the situation entirely during both the last two waves, and even refused to accept doses of vaccine from international organizations. While the measures taken by the authorities during the first wave of the pandemic had an impact on the Yemeni economy, these are as nothing compared to the impact of the second and third waves and the war implications. This paper reviews the spread of the virus in the second and third waves as compared to the first and the preventative measures taken, before examining the economic repercussions. It concludes that Yemen needs a political settlement to restore democracy and eliminate the effects of the pandemic and the war in tandem.



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The GCC States after Covid-19: Towards Knowledge Economies in the Post-Oil Era.

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Arab Gulf states were already in a period of economic transformation since their development plans and visions aim to shift their economies away from reliance on oil and gas towards post-oil advanced knowledge economies based on firm and sustainable foundations. The GCC countries are aware of the importance of this transformation, not just because of the recent large fall in oil prices following on from the 2014 price collapse, but because the "oil age" is drawing near its end. Accordingly, this paper discusses the combined efforts of the Arab Gulf countries to advance in information technology, education, innovation and entrepreneurship to enhance their global competitiveness towards knowledge economies since the period before the outbreak of Covid-19. Progress is reflected on the indices published by various international organizations. The paper also discusses how Covid-19 and the fall in oil prices obliged governments in the region to intensify economic diversification efforts and shift to knowledge economies. In this regard, the whole GCC region displayed great digital flexibility. Thanks to their political stability, large financial buffers and stable credit ratings, these countries have a strong foundation for future sustainable development towards knowledge-based economies. This paper aims to present the characteristics of a knowledge-based economy and show how the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of mobilizing the pillars of a knowledge-based economy. It also shows how the pandemic has boosted diversification efforts in the GCC region and finally offers some recommendations for structural reforms.

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