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Confronting the Challenge of Political Reforms in GCC States: Domestic Transition via Regional Integration

Rhea Abraham| Feb 2015

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Abstract

Political reform is the most urgent challenge facing the six states of the Arab Gulf today. Despite their exceptional political stability during the Arab Spring of 2011, a fundamental structural imbalance exists between the pace of the states' economic development and their political growth. This, coupled with emerging social forces, means that educated youth and women in particular have begun to demand reform across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).Politically, none of the GCC States is alone in facing this set of challenges; each has over successive generations promulgated a constitution, which has been followed in turn with demands for change and reform. While the problems facing GCC States in this field are by and large the same, their collective failure to address demands for reform puts all of the states at a heightened internal security threat, affecting not only the individual states but the region as a whole.

The recognition of these common concerns would open opportunities for GCC States to pursue a program of sustainable political reforms under the umbrella of inclusive regional integration agreements. These would complement the political aspirations of the states' citizens, and ensure individual contributions from each GCC member.

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Introduction

The term 'region' describes a physically contiguous and proximal geographic area, but it also refers to an area that shares similarities of culture, ethnicity and social systems. Political analysts Graham Evans and Richard Newnham in "The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations" have used the term to describe an area that is homogenous at the social, economic and political levels. In their description, they also noted the possibility of regional integration through multidimensional aspects of a common value system.[1] Jean Grugel and Wil Hout agree, and add in their work "Regionalism across the North-South Divide: State Strategies and Globalisation," that in the developing world–with its tendency toward overriding factors such as culture, language and tribe—regionalisation or the inclination to form regional organisations becomes the best possible response to globalisation. The authors, who look at political reform, have found that such regional associations help in promoting different types of democratic practice in a region.[2]

The area covered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) thus constitutes a region in the Arabian Gulf, whose nations share common political and cultural objectives. The GCC, made up of the six oil monarchies—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—stands distinct among other regional organisations. This is principally due to their persistent monarchies, and the political normalization of tribal affinities, which have operated within the states for generations. Established in 1981, mainly to deal with security-related concerns mostly associated with the rise of Iranian power, GCC States also share similar political characteristics, and can be described as having similar geographical and economic circumstances. These similarities aided in the formation of the GCC, and also the cooperation between states more generally. Besides adhering to the main objectives of the GCC and working to strengthen political relationship between member countries and enhance economic ties, the GCC has also expanded its remit in recent years. Today, the GCC not only deals with issues of security, but also forms common policy on reforms, culture, trade, customs, legislation,

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[1] Hussein Solomon, 'Democratization: Some Theoretical Methodological Considerations,' in Gulshan Dietl, ed., *Democracy and Democratization in the Gulf* (New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2010), 16-17.

[2] Solomon, 17.

administration, scientific and technical progress in industry and water resources, and recently defence.[3]

With the rapid changes in booming oil economies, traditional politics in the Gulf region have changed considerably over the years, due to factors as diverse as the expansion of societies, elaborate administration systems, diffuse relationships between members of society, and traditional patron-client relationship being supplanted by relationships based on education, occupation, and professional interests.[4] Simultaneously with these social and administrative changes, GCC States –whose populations have a high percentage of youth—are witnessing rampant educational progress, which has accelerated the political consciousness of younger generations. Not only are the youth aware of civic and human rights, but they are also educated with an awareness of global issues. Education also means that youth have greater socio-political aspirations than ever before, leading to demands for participation in the qualitative process of governance.[5] Reforms in GCC countries can be seen generally as a reflection of the wider regional transformations witnessed by each state. These transformations eventually alter the way both any given state and its citizens set about structuring their nation's political, economic and social interactions. For example, in their confrontations with internal security challenges, each state has worked differently in responding to the aspirations of their people for good governance and political participation, mainly for women.

The demands for reform made by the protesters who took to the streets in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) amid what came to be known as the "Arab Spring" created a sense of urgency to deal with domestic political instability amongst GCC States. The primary avenue for this reform has been through an intensification of regional integration efforts around security interests, principally under the auspices of the organisation of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

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[3] 'GCC Digital Library,' http://sites.gcc-sg.org/DLibrary/index-eng.php?action=Subject

[4] J E Peterson, 'The GCC states: Participation, Opposition and the Fraying of the Social Contract,' *Research Paper of the Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no.26 (December 2012): 4, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/55258/1/Peterson_2012.pdf

[5] Shamlan Yousef Al Issa, 'The Political Impact of Globalization on the Arab Gulf States,' in Bassam Tibi, ed., *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future* (Abu Dhabi: EmiratesCenter for Strategic Studies and Research, 2005), 97.

Methodology and Objectives

In order to investigate these reforms and the process by which they are being implemented, this article is divided into two parts. The first looks to understand the formation of the GCC, the regional transformations taking place in the Gulf, the process of national political reforms, and the existing political challenges in the region. Building on these findings, the second section examines the need for the GCC to bridge these challenges and sustain internal security mechanisms through internal integration agreements. Looking at developments from the turn of the millennium, the paper will identify the pattern of modernisation. In its analysis, the paper will look in particular at how political challenges in one Gulf country affect not only that state, but also the region as a whole. Analysis of political participation will be studied through the role of the constitutional amendments and political participation of minorities— namely women—in the GCC countries.

The paper maintains that political transition proceeds with the capacity of states to cope with the challenges of globalization and to transform into post-traditional societies. The paper suggests that the GCC, a security community, serves as a platform for collective action that can help to promote long term stability. The GCC has already initiated talks on economic integration in terms of a customs union and a monetary policy. The paper thus aims to explore the importance of regional integration and parallel agreements in addressing political challenges of governance and maintaining internal security. At the moment, there exists only regional cooperation in these fields, and new discourses could further promote domestic transition of political reforms by cushioning future impediments to development. In order to further develop an argument for regional cooperation, other examples of political integrative techniques from regional organisations such as the European Union (EU), MERCOSUR, and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) shall be examined.

A final section will focus on the challenges and drawbacks of political integration. This will be done in order to grapple with the complexity of regional integration, which will be developed here as part of the concept of institutionalisation. In order to proceed with such a process, the complexity of the structural characteristics of the GCC must be taken into account. In addition, to factor this into a discussion of cooperation, the concept of a political confederation will be examined. The paper concludes that integration in a member-based regional organisation will not only help systematically

deal with security at the external level, but also internally. The paper finds that regional integration can facilitate political stability through the sustenance of multi-layered institutional structures of governance.

GCC and Political Reforms

Like economic cooperation, political cooperation in one form or another existed among Gulf Arab states many years prior to the formation of the GCC. This pre-GCC tradition of cooperation greatly facilitated post-GCC activities, especially in non-military fields. During the early stages, internal Gulf security cooperation consisted principally of an exchange of data on the presence and activities of expatriates in member states, and on the presence of militants and any underground organizations.

The effort to create a kind of cooperative framework for the Gulf dates to the late 1960s. Initial efforts were thwarted, however, largely because of differing internal political ideologies, regional rivalry, impacts of globalisation, and the Cold War. Another factor was the relative poverty of the Arab Gulf states up until this period, with economies that ran on primitive forms of agriculture limited by the harsh desert conditions. The main economic activities of the region revolved around fishing, coastal trade, and pearling. However, the introduction of oil economies radically changed the situation. As a result, the six states that today make up the GCC became modern, urbanized, and bureaucratically organized centres of regional and international finance and commerce.

Understanding its Political Formation

The formation of the GCC can thus be seen as a direct response to a series of events that began at the end of the 1970s. This began with an economic process propelled by oil market developments, the emergence of communism, the downfall of the Shah's regime in Iran, the outbreak of Iran-Iraq war, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Practical cooperation was thus initiated, and Gulf identity began to coalesce in order to enhance security from this point on. This led to the founding of the GCC.[6]

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[6]Neil Patrick, 'The GCC: Gulf State Integration or Leadership Cooperation?,' *Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no.19 (November 2011): 6,www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/programmes/kuwait/research/papers/GCC.aspx

The similarities between GCC member states in terms of political structure and how security threats are understood have enabled the organisation to adopt common stands towards political issues. They have also made it easier to develop policies based on the principles of good neighbourliness and respect for the sovereignty of each state over its territories and resources, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.[7] Coordination and cooperation in the field of internal policy has aimed at adopting similar positions towards political issues common to GCC States. In terms of external policy, the GCC has worked to act alongside other global partners based on principals of mutual respect. It has been thus that GCC States have maintained common interests while enhancing the stability and security in the region, which has been mainly for its people.

History of GCC Security Cooperation

In the 1980s, with its creation acting as a regional counterweight, the political and strategic objectives of the GCC focused on maintaining the stability and security of Gulf States throughout the Iraq-Iran war. This required collective action to avoid either expansion or escalation of the war in the region. In 1986, a security agreement that would allow member states to call on others to constrain the political activities of exiled opposition figures resident in their territory was made, with all member states except Kuwait acceding to the agreement.[8] Despite tension with Kuwait, by the 1990s, its liberation from the clutches of Saddam's Iraq became a top priority for the GCC. The period also saw the entry of the United States into Gulf security. By placing US security forces in the Gulf, the Americans became the sole guarantors of protection against external intervention. The period of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait also saw collective action used to support United Nations diplomacy efforts around resolutions against the Iraqi invasion.

Following the resolution of the Iraq war, the GCC supported the UAE in exercising its right, through all peaceful means, to restore its sovereignty over three disputed islands: the Greater Tunb, the Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, which had been occupied by Iran since 1971. It further sought to establish better relations with Iran through the development of a collective framework of cooperation. These efforts culminated in several agreements and protocols around economic and security issues made with Iran.

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[7]'GCC Political Affairs', http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/index15af.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=48
[8]Abdulhadi Khalaf, 'The Elusive Quest for Gulf Security,' *MERIP Middle East Report*, no. 148(1987), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer148/elusive-quest-gulf-security

Over the years, and within the Arab framework, GCC member states also adopted collective action to support issues within the Arab world, principal among these was the Palestinian issue and the peace process in the Middle East. In its action here the GCC States worked to preserve the rights of Arabs and Muslims in the region through collective interventions and support. By the turn of the 21st century, a shift can be seen in GCC collective actions, and the body's main objectives became focused on issues closer to home. In particular, officials were pursuing the creation of a customs union, the harmonization of GCC-country policies, and the integration of member states into a cultural, geographic, economic, and political union. At the same time, the internal politics of GCC States began to put a high priority on issues such as human and environmental, in particular at the municipal level.

Today, Gulf States have come to realize that coordination, and most critically the integration of their security capabilities (as enshrined in the Council's constitution), is necessary to solve the current economic, social, and political problems of individual states.

Political Transformations in the GCC

The Need for Reforms

Changes in the financial markets during the 1990s, fluctuating oil prices, and the need for economic diversification forced a change in both the political and social spheres of Gulf States. According to analysts Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger, this marked a period of liberalisation in the Arab Gulf countries, which in turn determined a systemic opening of the political system, from issuing legal constitutions, holding regular elections,[9] improving human rights, granting political rights to women, increasing freedom of opinion and expression, to the expansion of public space.[10]This process meant that politics and society were brought together in a new way, changing traditional channels of legitimacy, which were no longer sufficient for governance. While liberalization pushed political transition in the GCC countries, it is important to see the changes as a gradual political opening and not an adoption of western-styled

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[9]Irem Askar, 'Political Liberalization in the Arab Gulf Monarchies with a Special Emphasis on the Experiences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia,' *A thesis submitted to The graduate school of social sciences of Middle East Technical University* (2005): 6, etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12606308/index.pdf

[10]Hassanein Tawfiq Ibrahim, 'Social and Political Change in the Wake of the Oil Boom,' *Arab Insight Report*, (2008): 116, mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/94028/.../Chapter+11.pdf

democratisation,[11] since the populations of the GCC States remain traditional (or neo-traditional) when it comes to reforms being initiated from the top down.

Though initially the individual States were able to stabilise demands for political opening through the establishment of a rentier economy, the rapid process of modernisation accelerated internal security challenges. This was principally due to issues of limited resources and the very gradual build-up of these resources in the hands of wider society, which at once spurred and made room for civil society to take autonomous action.[12] In the phase of transition, the emerging middle class (the largest indigenous group in the Gulf countries), became indispensable. It was this class that would lend or cast doubt on the legitimacy of the GCC monarchs. The new age middle class, as they came to be known, continued to be driven by the knowledge economy and in particular the IT revolution. These changed somewhat the traditional societies of the region, so that focus shifted from collectives to individual participation in the state. This in turn meant institutional changes in government and social structures. These forces eventually fuelled the demands of the reform movements after 2011.[13]

Domestic Political Reforms in the GCC States

The need for reform after the period of liberalisation brought the issue of public satisfaction to the top of the public agenda. The high levels of wealth, standards of living, loyalty to tribal cultures and co-optation policies of the GCC States exacerbated the issue,[14] which can be seen in the types of policies GCC States put in place over the years. The policies, which will be looked at in depth below, set up various mechanisms to improve their political functions and enhance domestic reforms principally through constitutional reforms and increasing political participation. Constitutional reforms included the creation of institutions, and the establishment of official procedures, while

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[11]Mohammad Al Rumaihi, 'The Gulf Monarchies: Testing Time,' *Middle East Quarterly* 3, no.4 (December 1996): 45-51, http://www.meforum.org/422/the-gulf-monarchies-testing-time

[12]GerdNonneman, 'Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies: From Liberalisation to Democratisation? A Comparative Perspective,' in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Steven Wright, eds., *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* (Lebanon: Ithaca Press, 2011), 19.

[13]Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, 'Repercussions of the Arab Spring on the GCC states,' *Research Paper of the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies* (May 2012): 27, english.dohainstitute.org/.../5b1fafdb-19d4-4946-a18e-f3115c6fd0aa.pdf

[14]Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Steven Wright, 'Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: from Liberalization to Enfranchisement,' *International Affairs* 83, no. 5 (2007): 916

political participation stressed the opening up and development of political debate to a wider section of society. These reforms served most importantly as an avenue for the individual or collective expression of opinions, and enhanced access to information for both youth and women.[15]

a. Constitutional reforms

Bahrain

Bahrain took steps towards increased levels of political participation even before it was declared a constitutional monarchy in 2002. With the shift from an economy based on pearl trading to oil reserves in the 70s, Bahrainis enjoyed a brief parliamentary experiment that began in 1972 and lasted until the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1975. It was some two decades later, in 1992, that a 30 member consultative council was established, restoring public participation in national affairs. The real change, however, came in March 1999, when Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa acceded to the throne, promising to address political and social concerns through the National Action Charter. In 2001, a political referendum was put forward for a constitutional monarchy with elected lower chamber of parliament (40 members), a consultative council, and independent judiciary.[16] Despite the political changes in Bahrain, the mounting pressure from opposition weighed on local politics, with petitions for the prevention of suits and torture –in particular that carried out on persons identified as suspect by the state—put forward to the Emir. This pressure worked, and a series of change were seen in the country that opened it up to wider public participation. In 2005, political societies were legalised in a pro-government enactment, and in 2006 a Shia was appointed Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain. In 2008, a Jewish Bahraini was appointed ambassador of Bahrain to the United States.

Kuwait

Kuwait's tryst with parliamentary politics began as early as 1962 with its adoption of a constitution and simultaneous elections for a national assembly. However, the period

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[15]Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani, 'Introduction,' in Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2006),12.

[16] Greg Power, 'The Difficult Development of Parliamentary Politics in the Gulf: Parliaments and the Process of Managed Reform in Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman,' *Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no. 25 (May 2012): 13-14, eprints.lse.ac.uk/55666/

also witnessed the suspension of the national assembly by the Emir, who would under various circumstances at various intervals (especially during in 1975-76 amid the Lebanese civil war, and in 1986 amid the rise of political Islam) suspend the assembly. With the first Gulf war weighing heavily on Kuwait's economy, the Emir imposed martial law on the country for three months. Parliamentary elections were introduced in 2003, and women were given the vote in 2005. In May the same year, Kuwait's members of parliament submitted a draft law to combat religious extremism and violence. In 2006, the central constitutional role of the parliament in the succession crisis of the Emirs proved a major political breakthrough in the country.

Saudi Arabia

In March 1992, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia circulated its Basic Law of Government, with a proposal to create a representative consultative council. In 1993, Saudi Arabia was divided into thirteen administrative divisions, and in 1997 the membership of the consultative council was increased from 60 to 90. In 1999, a select number of women were allowed to attend the Consultative Council. In 2002, Saudi revised its criminal code so that torture was banned, and rights of suspects—including migrants—were guaranteed in law.[17] This expansion of rights and participation continued, and in December 2003, June 2004 and again in September 2004, several rounds of National Dialogue were held to discuss religious differences, education concerns, gender matters and municipal elections. In March 2004 the Saudi government allowed the establishment of the National Human Rights Association, a body that would review complaints about human rights violations and compliance with international human rights agreements. The first municipal elections were held between 2005 and 2007, and in this period religious police were banned from detaining suspects and an overhaul of the judicial system was carried out. Finally, showing a distribution of powers, wider authority was given to the Majlis al Shura to propose legislation.

Qatar

Qatar ushered in suffrage through municipal elections in 1999. In April 2003, Qatari citizens, including women, voted and approved a new constitution for the sheikhdom that called for the establishment of a 45-member parliament, composed of 30 elected and 15 appointed representatives. The country's rapidly evolving political institutions

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[17]Ana Echagüe and Edward Burke, 'Strong Foundations? The Imperative for Reform in Saudi Arabia,' *Working Paper*, no. 84 (June 2009): 21, www.fride.org/download/WP84_Arabia_Saudi_reform_ENG_jul09.pdf

slowly worked to pave the way toward modernisation, which was largely ushered in with the success of the Al Jazeera media network, which launched in 1996. The success of the network went hand in hand with the end of formal censorship and dismantling of the country's information ministry. In 2005, Qatar's written constitution came into effect and a new labour law came into force, expanding and protecting (the albeit limited) rights of workers.[18] In 2008, the first official church was inaugurated in Qatar, allowing open worship to non-Muslims.[19] Most recently, in 2011, a proposal for legislative elections was put forward.

Oman

The Sultanate of Oman has experimented with various paths toward democratization since 1970, when its Majlis al-Dawla was created, and its appointment of women to the body as early as 1997. In November 1996, Sultan Qaboos bin Said introduced a Basic Law that laid out the duties of the Sultan and his people, which included sections on non-discrimination on the grounds of gender. The written constitution provided a Bill of Rights, guaranteed freedom of the press, encouraged religious tolerance, insisted on an equality of race and gender, and appointed an independent judiciary.[20] In 2003, elections were held under the expanded suffrage laws. In April 2005 a decree was issued allowing Omanis to marry citizens of GCC States without seeking permission. The Sultan brought in amendments to the Basic Law and also removed corrupt ministers from government.

United Arab Emirates

The UAE's first elections for its consultative Federal National Council were held only in 2005, with the supremacy of the Federal Supreme Council facilitated by the seven rulers of the Sheikhdom. Though it was the first such election, both men and women were able to participate. In 2006, the UAE relaxed its labour laws with the formation of trade unions and has been focusing on economic reforms as part of a larger diversification strategy. In 2007, the royals issued a decree that journalists could no longer be imprisoned for reasons relating to their work, setting a first for the decriminalization of

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[18] 'Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms – Qatar,'
www.carnegieendowment.org/arabpoliticalsystems

[19] Shabina S Khatri, 'Qatar Opens First Church, Quietly,' *Al Jazeera* June 20, 2008
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2008/03/2008525173738882540.html

[20] 'Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms – Oman,'
www.carnegieendowment.org/arabpoliticalsystems

media offenses in the region.[21]The UAE enacted a law in November 2006 that made human trafficking punishable by life imprisonment, and set up a national committee to combat human trafficking in May 2007.

b. Women and political participation

The six GCC States have, in various capacities over the years, introduced reforms that have enhanced the entry of women into governance. The majority of women in GCC countries are educated, with adult literacy rates of 84%.[22] According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the number of parliamentary seats occupied by women in the Gulf countries has reached: seven in the UAE, five in Kuwait, four in Bahrain, and one in Oman.

In different capacities, Kuwaiti women enjoy social liberties as guaranteed in their constitution according to the 1962 electoral law. A woman minister was elected to the parliament in 2002, while in October 2003 the cabinet approved a plan to give women in Kuwait City the right to vote and stand for municipal elections. In May 2004, the government introduced a bill to give women the same rights for parliamentary elections. In 2009, women were allowed to obtain passports without the consent of their husband's, and women MPs were discussing a choice over dress code.[23]In Bahrain, the February 2002 constitution gave women the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary election, with the first female minister elected in 2004, and the first female judge in 2006. Sheikh Hamad appointed five women to the Shura Council, and simultaneously allowed women to stand and vote in local elections.

Similarly, the UAE appointed women to positions in the Federal National Council, judiciary, and as prosecutors in 2004. Qatar, has allowed women to participate in municipal elections since 1999, with the first women winning seats only in 2003 and then later in 2007, to the Central Municipal Council. Women have also been appointed

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[21] 'Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms – United Arab Emirates,'

www.fride.org/eng/Publications/Publication.aspx?Item=787

[22] 'GCC Women: Challenging the Status Quo,' *Report of AlMasah Capital Limited*, January 2012: 2, almasahcapital.com/.../marketreport/120127_GCC_Women_Report.pdf

[23] Wanda Krauuse, 'Gender and Participation in the Arab Gulf,' in David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen, eds., *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order* (UK: Routledge, 2012), 90.

to the positions of minister of education, public prosecutor, director of the University of Qatar, and deputy director and dean of the one of the country's faculties of Islamic Law and Islamic Studies.[24] Oman allowed participation of women in parliamentary elections in 2000, with the first female minister being elected in 2003 alongside the establishment of universal suffrage. In 2005 the Sultan of Oman appointed nine women to the Majlis al-Dawla. Seven women now serve in the State Council, two women are ministers, one serves as an ambassador, and four are undersecretaries; a Saudi woman was chosen by the United Nations Secretary-General as the executive director of its Population Fund. Ten women participated with 50 men in the Saudi National Dialogue program, 55 women were among the 306 signatories of a reform petition presented to the Crown Prince, and 300 women signed a subsequent petition asking for the recognition of Saudi women as full citizens enjoying equal rights.[25]In 2008, the first woman minister was appointed and in 2011, the King gave a royal decree for women to vote and run in municipal elections after 2015. Though driving is still banned for women in the country (despite continuous protests), the King did pardon women caught driving in 2011. Also, in 2012 women athletes were allowed to participate in the Olympic Games for the first time.

Smaller states like Qatar and Oman, along with the UAE, remain more vocal in publicizing women's rights issues and placing women in visible positions of political and economic leadership. Prominent royal wives such as Sheikha Mozah of Qatar have taken on a leading role in educational and cultural development, and are becoming more assertive in entering the public policy arena. Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid bin Sultan al-Qasimi of the UAE, and Lama al-Sulaiman of Saudi Arabia, remain notable examples of women who have made a mark in politics and business respectively.

Compared to other Arab states, the Gulf monarchies were well ahead in their initial response to globalization and have been showing greater confidence in dealing with its prospects and risks even today.[26] The earlier reforms under the younger generation of Gulf monarchs concentrated on industrialising the region, and used political

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[24]Ebtisam Al Kitbi, 'Women's Political Status in the GCC States,' July 20, 2004, http://carnegieendowment.org/2008/08/20/women-s-political-status-in-gcc-states/f9ny

[25]Kitbi.

[26]Silvia Colombo, 'The GCC Countries and the Arab Spring: Between Outreach, Patronage and Repression,' *IAI Working Paper*, no 12 (March 2012): 10, 13, www.iai.it/pdf/dociai/iaiwp1209.pdf

participation in the form of elections and constitutional amendments to help achieve this. The modernisation period that began in 2000—accelerated by the new oil boom—fostered a spirit of political activism and thirst for social participation within the region's civil societies. The economic reforms increased competitiveness of the Gulf countries due to improved oil prices, this has been reinforced with sound policies over the last couple of years that have largely included investment in infrastructure, and improvements in educational systems.[27] The agencies developed in the initial phase of liberlisation became formal institutions with ministries, security organs, and royal court organisations towards a growing bureaucracy.

While these changes are remarkable, it must be noted that they focused more on economic than political reforms,[28] even when taking into account the strengthening of the *majlis* or *diwaniyah* in playing a stronger legitimate role in legislation. Despite modernisation of state structures carried out under British rule, some traditional values such as religion, social status, personal connections, and kinship remained prevalent and continue to dictate relationships in society. In particular, these values form the core of patron-client features, such as the sponsorship system. Consequently, issues of citizenship and identity have been raised as legitimate concerns over the years by nationals and minorities in the region.

The Arab Spring (2011-2012)

Theory states that monarchies as a separate type of institutional structure are independent from categorization as 'personalist' regimes, as were seen in countries like Egypt and Libya. Monarchies are distinct because they operate on the institutionalization of hereditary rule, with legitimacy derived from dynastic birth. Therefore, in monarchical systems, where monarchies are an integral element of the traditional political environment largely supported by the public, it is understood that protest movements are usually agitated by foreign agents and political instability is caused by opposition movements.[29]However, modern Arab monarchs under the

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[27]Martin Hvidt, 'Economic and Institutional Reforms in the Arab Gulf Countries,' *Middle East Journal*65, no 1(2011): 96.

[28]Martin, 102.

[29]Scott Williamson, 'Divided We Stand – The Resilience of Monarchies in the Arab Spring,'2011, polisci.indiana.edu/undergraduate/theses/Williamson.pdf

pressure of globalisation continue to face what Samuel P. Huntington called "the king's dilemma," the phenomenon whereby modernization introduced as top-down reforms frequently increases demands for change from the middle-class including demands for political reforms.

In the context of the protests that erupted in 2011, in an era of revolutionary turmoil and discontent in WANA, the Arab Gulf sheikhdoms faced public pressure but were able to maintain stability unlike their dictatorial neighbours in North Africa. Protest movements in Saudi Arabia were defused with constitutional reforms while youth rallies in Kuwait never questioned the authority of the reigning al-Sabah dynasty. There was limited opposition against the ruling families of the seven Emirates and the kingdom of Qatar, while small-scale demonstrations in Oman were easily contained by the state's forces. Only in the tiny kingdom of Bahrain did a rebellion, centred more on sectarian strife, threaten stability. While there are local differences, it can be said that the GCC States reacted collectively to the uprising in and around the region through economic reforms, patronage and political reforms. In restricted cases (mainly in Bahrain), violent protests led into stricter punishments enforced by state authorities including the revocation of citizenship held by what were labelled illegal migrants. The GCC convened an emergency meeting to pledge support for Bahrain and proposed to deploy, for the first time, its joint forces for internal security purposes. However, the protests were managed locally by the Peninsula Shield security forces, and peace and stability were restored in the region.

The GCC countries confronted the challenge of the Arab Spring differently, and based on their capabilities and degree of influence. Their reactions were based on the extent of impact of the protests in the respective countries. Amid the tumult of the Arab Spring, monarchies appeared to possess important assets that enabled them to better manage the storms raging throughout the region, as they offered a sense of predictability to politics and reduced the stakes of non-state interference in the region.[30]The reforms that were implemented to reduce internal tension included moderate political changes including the right of Saudi women to vote and run in the municipal election. Though limited, reforms indicated a major step forward in the region.

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[30]'Arab Uprisings: The Arab Monarchy Debate,' *POMEPS*, no. 16 (December 2012): 6, pomeps.org/wp.../12/POMEPS_BriefBooklet16_Monarchies_web.pdf

Despite their success at managing the turmoil, the regimes of the Gulf States considered the Arab Spring a threat to their stability and cause for immediate concern, thereby deliberately warranting a response. Their response had been two-fold: addressing the crisis internally, through a combination of political, social and economic incentives/reforms; and, regionally by getting support via political alliances.[31]

Existing Political Challenges in the Region

The total spending by the GCC States during the period of the Arab Spring is said to have increased by 20 per cent only taking into account the issuance of emergency welfare packages and provisions to employ nationals in the ministries, social housing packages and investments for electricity and water generation.[32] Rising commitments put a strain on public finances, with oil receipts funding a larger proportion of government spending than before the Arab Spring.[33] Each GCC country continues to maintain a domestic political status quo, fearing the removal of traditional sources of legitimacy, though this varies considerably depending on a government's capability for reform implementation, since reforms continue to be factor-driven. The existing literature states that while the announced economic and social packages have certainly alleviated tensions, the policies themselves only deal with short-term problems and ignore the structural issues of modernisation facing each country. Initial steps announced so far are unlikely to be sufficient, and deeper political-institutional reforms are an increasing necessity.

However, the initial sense of anticipation that came with the promulgation of reforms and the pushing through of projects has given way to a perception that many, although they brought about important changes, are not compatible with the goals or path of modernisation in the region.[34] The rentier system of economic conditions, moreover,

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[31]Silvia Colombo, 'The GCC and the Arab Spring: A Tale of Double Standards,' *The International Spectator*47, no 4 (2012): 114-115.

[32]Kristian Ulrichsen, 'Domestic Implications of the Arab Uprisings in the Gulf,' in Anna Echague, ed., *The Gulf States and the Arab Spring* (Spain: FRIDE, 2013), 35-36.

[33]Nael Shehadeh, 'Economic Costs, the Arab Spring and GCC,' *GRC Analysis,*(November 2011):2, http://www.grc.net/index.php?frm_action=view_newsletter_web&sec_code=grcanalysis&frm_module=contents&show_web_list_link=1&int_content_id=76590

[34]Edward Burke and Christian Koch, 'Political Reform in the GCC and Its Implications for EU Policy,' 2010: 1-2, www.fride.org/download/CR_politcal_reform_ENG_nov09.pdf

tends to exacerbate the growing levels of unemployment, with ripple effects of escalating crime, and corruption. These will have political consequences that may lead to discontent among the citizenry, due to the inability of the state to integrate new elements of civil society, to meet demands for political participation, or respond to the growing pressure for drastic reforms.[35]

Individual GCC states are also dealing with their own specific set of internal problems. For example, though Kuwait's parliament plays an active and substantive role in governance—both in legislating and in government monitoring—the country is at a political impasse so great that its parliament has been dissolved. This has been found to impede economic progress in the country,[36] and led to fears by neighbouring GCC countries of similar outcome from their respective reform movements. At the same time, the country faces a dilemma over their Bidoon population, with the question of citizenship and illegal migration remaining unresolved despite the creation of the Bidoon committee.

The region also faces issues due to the presence of large traditional tribal societies. Saudi Arabia's strong tribal presence, for example, means that the country faces challenges in coping with modern political institutions, economic rationalization, and the demands from minorities. It is not only traditional networks that prevent reforms, however. Bahrain's high level of unemployment among nationals, which is a growing private-sector issue, has challenged reforms, and likewise the UAE's problem with an overdependence on foreign workers. The UAE also faces the political pressures associated with a federation, which means that there is often a difficulty in creating a consensus for political reforms despite facilitation of economic independence to the region due to various forms of diversification.[37]Qatar faces the difficulty of balancing global expectations with domestic probabilities, and Oman has its own crisis of succession. Finally, despite existing measures by the GCC States, participation of

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[35]Turki al Hamad, 'Will the GCC Monarchies Work Together?' *Middle East Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March 1997): 47-53.

[36]Fahad Al-Zumai, 'Kuwait's Political Impasse and Rent-Seeking Behaviour: A Call for Institutional Reform,'*Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no. 29 (June 2013): 3, http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/programmes/kuwait/documents/Kuwaits-political-impasse-and-rent-seking-behaviour.pdf

[37] Joseph A Kechichian, 'Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC,' *Middle East Policy Council Journal* 11, no.4 (2004): 37-57.

women in the political arena remains low, primarily due to socio-cultural factors and lack of cultural awareness.

A major structural weakness that has prevented the institutionalization of forward-looking reforms in all GCC States (excluding Bahrain and Kuwait) remains the absence of fully functional civil societies as a base for government policies. This lack of political enhancement may be harmful to the long-term evolution of GCC polities as it delays vital legislation aimed at economic diversification and political maturation.[38] Additionally, unstable state structures and overlapping bureaucratic measures may seem to impede incremental reform currently under way in the region. Moreover, the partial political reforms undertaken by each of the states of the GCC may lead to longer-term debates between the monarchs and civil society on the direction of future change in Gulf polities. Arab analysts state that the future will be largely decided by how the monarchies deal not just with the issue of political reform, but also with a set of complex and interrelated socio-political challenges of nation building and adjustment to the powerful forces unleashed by the process of globalization.[39]

Despite all of these challenges, in the global context, regime changes in neighbouring countries of Iraq, Iran, and Syria, along with the looming threat of terrorism, may force a regional environment that makes it possible for the GCC to economically and politically integrate. In order to do so, however, both internal and external political challenges will have to be implemented and inclusive counter measures will need to be promoted to strengthen internal cohesion for a consensual transition in post-traditional societies.[40] Not only will a platform like the GCC become crucial for accommodating political reforms that ensure the internal security of the member states, but it will also be important as a way to generate funding and expertise that will aid in the organization's policy coordination and crisis management.

Role of the GCC

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[38]Ulrichsen, *Gulf Security*, 21

[39]Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, 'Contemporary Socio-Political Issues of the Arab Gulf Moment,' *Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no.11(2010): 3, www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/programmes/.../kuwait/.../PaperAbdulla.pdf

[40] Kristen Ulrichsen, 'Gulf Security: Changing Internal and External Dynamics,' *Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, (May 2009): 21 , eprints.lse.ac.uk/25237/

The collective response of the GCC to the Arab Spring has been mature not only in terms of immediate reaction internally, but also when it came to external pressure from crisis situations; that it managed this without the interference of the West is of particular note. Analysis of the reaction has revealed a division of responsibility between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which has been found to have been significant in the functional attainment of a common goal when it came to the management of political stability. This division should be replicated in future, so that each Gulf State might take control over specific functions and thus collectively help stabilise threats.[41] The successful division in the wake of the Arab Spring has spurred talks of a possible upgrading of the GCC into a Gulf Union for strategic considerations. The development of such a body has been discussed even within the Consultative Summit of the GCC in 2012. The time has come to take action on the idea, and political integration, rather than simply cooperation, should be initiated as a critical mechanism to meet demands for political reform.[42] Corrective measures, if implemented or supported by a larger body, may help GCC States implement political reforms domestically without fear of destabilisation.

Regional Integration and Globalisation

The subject of integration in International Relations (IR) was initiated after the Second World War, where it developed as a system of cumulative knowledge and historical and intellectual trends[43], and which eventually gave structure to the study of regional cooperation and later integration.

This idea of regional cooperation forms a major part of how the GCC works, but action around it remains dependent on the unanimous and voluntary decisions of its members. Under the GCC's purview, compliance to agreements is mostly based on the utility of their outcomes. Collective efforts at the regional level are thus often conditional.[44]

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[41]Colombo, *The GCC Countries*, 9.

[42]Elena Maestri, 'Schism within the GCC or "the Same Old Tribal Politics"?,' *GMF and IAI Op-Med*, March 2013, www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Op-Med_16.pdf

[43] Reyadh Alasfoor. *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Its Nature and Achievements. A Political Analysis of Regional Integration of the GCC States 1979-2004*, (Sweden: Lund University, 2007), 15, www.svet.lu.se/Fulltext/Alasfoor.pdf

[44]Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Regional Cooperation and Regional Integration: Concepts, Measurements and a Bit of Theory,' January 2007: 4,

However, when cooperation initiatives acquire a legitimate capacity to act—mandating a cooperative council, project etc. — by initiating proposals, making decisions, and/or implementing policies, then regionalism could switch from cooperation to integration. There are examples of such regional integration worldwide, and research has shown that they increase the interactions between partners and create new forms of organisation, co-existing with traditional forms of state-led organization at the national level.[45]

The GCC has already in fact achieved integration at the cultural level, and for the most part it is the diverse socio-economic conditions of each country and external conditions that prevent further integration.[46] In the Gulf, there are already dozens of organizations engaged in regional cooperation that are working to build up mutual trust and interdependencies; however, only a few of them manage to contribute to regional integration. Regional integration of a security community in the form of federation or confederation remains consensus-oriented and, moderately beneficial with a greater variety of participating actors.[47] These regional integration efforts aim to overcome two fundamental problems in relations, namely those of defection (changing alliances) and distribution (power of authority),[48] thereby making integration a more efficient tool in dealing with long-term crisis situations.

One useful discussion on international and regional integration has been outlined by neo-realist Karl Deutsch, who defined political integration in terms of meeting challenges of security in a regional context. According to Deutsch, political integration is a process that may lead to a condition in which a group of people—which come to form a security community—have "*attained within a territory a sense of community and of*

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http://unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/07%20REGIONAL%20COOPERATION%20AND%20INTEGRATION2.pdf

[45]Philippe De Lombaerde and Luk Van Langenhove, 'Indicators of Regional Integration: Conceptual and Methodological Issues,' *UNU-CRIS Working Paper*, no. 15 (2004): 1, www.researchgate.net/...Indicators_of_Regional_Integration_Methodological_Issues.pdf

[46]Schmitter, 5

[47]Robert Copper, 'Understanding Regional Integration in the GCC,' July 8 2013, http://www.e-ir.info/2013/07/08/understanding-regional-integration-in-the-gcc/

[48]BjörnHettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, 'Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges,' in *Report forInternational Task Force on Global Public Goods, Achieving Global Public Goods* (Stockholm: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006): 198, 227.

institutions and practice strong enough to assure for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population.[49]In an article titled "Political Community and the North Atlantic Area," Deutsch describes communities as groups of people who share common attributes, display mutual responsiveness, confidence and esteem, and who consciously self-identify. The international community, he goes on, may thus be either amalgamated or pluralistic. If amalgamated, the community would look very much like a federation or nation state, with institutions of central government regulating the internal or external relations of an integrated population.[50] By contrast, the pluralistic international community is a population integrated into at least a security community, but politically fragmented into two or more sovereign states much like a confederation. These models can be used as a framework to guide integration for GCC States.

Regional integration theories have developed significantly from the 1950s and 1960s, when they dealt primarily with European integration. During the 1960s, regional cooperation prompted a flourishing need amongst Third World countries in Latin America, West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa to produce regional organizations for a variety of economic, political, and cultural purposes. However since the late 1980s there has been an explosion of new forms of regionalism all over the world, with many regionalization processes emerging through the revitalization or expansion of regional projects to form organisations such as the ASEAN, GCC, Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). These groupings, under the category of 'New Regionalism,' are characterized by multidimensionality and complexity, and tend to involve youth and minorities, who often come together in informal networks and multi-actor coalitions operating at different levels of the world system.[51] Because of its close relationship with globalization, 'New Regionalism' is fundamentally different from the regional cooperation that emerged after the Second World War, which in turn affects how it can and should be used to deal with current regional and global challenges. New Regionalism as part of a global transformation tends to create a multilevel system of governance, with vertical and

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[49] James Eayrs, 'Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience by Karl W. Deutsch,' *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue Canadienned'Economique et de Science Politique*24, no. 1 (Feb., 1958): 121-123.

[50]Eayrs, 123

[51] Bjorn and Fredrik, 183.

horizontal interaction that push for institutional reforms under the forces of globalization and regionalization.

Why Regional Integration for the GCC?

The GCC is an ideal case study for understanding what cooperation can bring to future political integration. As it stands, GCC States have matured from the old wave of regionalism, a protectionist security bloc in the context of the Cold war, to a new model characterized by deepening integration of politics and economies with stronger links to multilateralism and good governance. [52] Globalization has forced national institutions in the Gulf to think in terms of common concerns rather than international relations, and has pushed the regional organization to build reactive interregional networks and partnerships with a variety of actors in response to global challenges.[53] The monarchies of the Gulf share a common cultural identity, common experiences and common areas of competence that help stabilize opportunities for integration.

There are good reasons to be optimistic about the possibilities of political reforms and integration agreements within the GCC organisation, the most significant of which are the unique characteristics of monarchism within an integrated community. A number of scholars have suggested that monarchies are likely to be the most successful at adapting and reforming under the pressure of globalising forces. The Gulf States have indeed proven to be more flexible as they have been able to adopt selective reforms as they see fit, without challenging the basis of the system.[54] Secondly, the introduction of the founding charter of the GCC commits member countries to achieving "coordination, integration and interdependence (*tashseeq, takamal and tarabit*) between them in all fields including economic, political and cultural fields."[55]These common elements were formally declared in Article 1 of the Basic Law, which states that the GCC organisation was established as a result of the shared characteristics and systems of the six Arab

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[52]Bessma F Al Momani, 'Reacting to Global Forces: Economic and Political Integration of the GCC,' *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies* 34, no. 128 (2008): 52.

[53]IngeKaul and Katell Le Goulven, 'Institutional Options for Producing Global Public Goods,' in Kaul et al, eds., *Providing Global Public Goods: Managing Globalisation*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 390.

[54] Julie Gauthier, 'Prospects for Democratization for the Oil Monarchies of the Persian Gulf,' 2007: 32, etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-11112007-214948/.../Gauthier_thesis.pdf

[55]Patrick, *The GCC State*, 2.

Gulf States and their foundation upon an Islamic doctrine.[56] Also, Article 4 of the GCC constitution declares the council's final goal as the complete unification of the six states.[57]

Integration is not only possible, given the framework within which cooperation already happens, but is also a critical tool for the management of internal security challenges. This is more the case now than it has ever been in the history of GCC cooperation. As the international community becomes more integrated amid rising levels of globalization, and the United States scales back its role in the region, GCC States will have to depend on each other for internal security. Given these factors, integration can:

- Help build and strengthen institutions designed to facilitate good governance, and increase civil participation

- Provide expertise for policy coordination and pool technical resources

- Promote harmonisation of external policies and joint representation at international conferences and meetings.

- Turn many national issues into sub regional issues

- Make the benefits of regionalism tangible at the national level without national interests competing with regional level interests or vice versa.

- Help to preserve and enlarge sovereignty, and thus strengthen the concept of national identity and integrity. [58]

- Help small countries substantially reduce costs and increase power in international negotiations by pooling their resources and acting together for shared interests

The GCC Confederation: A Neo-Realist Approach

In multi-ethnic societies like the Gulf region, a GCC political confederation would provide opportunity for integration without encroaching on the sovereignty of member

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[56]Hamad.

[57]'The GCC Charter,' http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html

[58] Maurice Schiff, 'Regional Integration as Politics,' in Maurice Schiff and L. Alan Winters, eds., *Regional integration and development* (Washington DC: Oxford University Press, 2003), 179

states, however, it does require the willingness of states to cooperate in order to be successful.[59] According to political scientist Murray Forsyth, confederation can be defined as a union of states established by some form of assembly or council. A common government can be formed when polities unite for strictly limited purposes, but where states remain dependent on constituent polities. Confederation is created on a contractual basis for the integration of independent states for a specific purpose, and confederal laws are able to accommodate heterogeneity and thereby allow division of power and responsibility among all member states.[60]

Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane's article "Transnational Relations and World Politics" drew out four conditions that would make integration possible: the presence of an existing security community, institutions that revolve around measuring the bureaucratic and jurisdictional strength of the central institutions in an integrative scheme of political units, attempts at policy coordination where regional community participants enact public policy as a group, and attitudinal policies which are the measurement of elite and mass attitudes toward the integrative scheme in question.[61] In order to initiate integration, therefore, preliminary policy coordination should involve periodic exchanges of views on issues of common interest or concern that may inform the policy choices of participating policymakers. This could be accomplished through the presentation of policies or commentary from other countries, and would produce a community of analysts and academics that would continue to share policy in the years ahead. It would also mean the creation of a more rigorous application of common standards and collective judgments that fit the needs of individual countries.[62]

In a pluralistic community like the GCC, politics is key. Be it economic, technological, or cultural pressures, political change must be initiated by, accepted or opposed by each member state, or by those who act in the name of the state. In particular, when elites

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[59]Schiff, 180.

[60]*XIAOKUN SONG,* 'Confederalism: A Review of Recent Literature,' in Bruno Coppieters, David Darchiashvili and NatellaAkaba, eds., *Federal Practice: Exploring alternatives for Georgia and Abkhazia* (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1999), 186.

[61]Reyadh Alasfoor, 49.

[62] Edwin M Truman, 'Asian Regional Policy Coordination, '*Working Paper*, no. 11-21 (December 2011), www.piie.com/publications/wp/wp11-21.pdf

are the decision-makers they can affect processes of integration by creating, impeding, or supporting public will.[63] There are thus two factors: the elite, who act as a dynamic force that shapes demand, and support, or refusal of policies; and the general public, which influences politics through its utilization of political resources. Deriving from Deutsch's definitions, possible political integration can be initiated by external influence such as apparent political, military, or economic threat; desire for security being a powerful stimulant to integration. The GCC, in facing immediate political challenges, must take action on plans to integrate.

The Way Forward

The integration of the six Gulf States, if implemented would be a political act brought about by the deliberate action of political elites and policy coordination. This would mean the creation of guidelines or rules, frequent reviews, enforcement devices, and prior commitment to achieving better outcomes for all countries on average over time. Its politicization may not be gradual, but will indicate both a shared conception of common interest and a perception of a profound security threat.[64] At present, the Gulf States see integration neither as an end in itself, nor as integration of nations, but integration of tribes within the much larger sphere-Arab nationalism. The project requires the perspective of a more globalised framework.[65]

By understanding the path taken by other regional organisations in sustaining political stability in their regions, a way forward can be found. The success of the EU can be an example for the GCC, and provides a model by which to understand the many roles of integration. The EU has become a political system that can make authoritative decisions for the entire group of participating states, since its members have accepted community law in the form of binding majority decisions.[66] A well-established mechanism for integration and political structure has helped the EU achieve success. The EU Court of Justice takes care of adjudication, the Council and the European

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[63]Reyadh Alasfoor, 47,191.

[64]Reyadh Alasfoor, 35.

[65] Neil Patrick, 'Nationalism in the Gulf States,' *Research Paper on Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no.5 (October 2009):32 , eprints.lse.ac.uk/55257/1/Patrick_2009.pdf

[66]Laursen, 7-8.

Parliament legislates and deals with policymaking, including distribution problems, while the Political Committee is responsible for directing the working groups and for the preparation of discussions at ministerial level in regard to political cooperation, through the incorporation of a clear mandate. However, it is not the only model to draw from.

When it comes to reforms for political participation of minorities through integration of state systems, a number of other regional organisations in developing countries provide better models. These organizations are also in the process of integration in political affairs; they might not have been able to completely achieve integration like the EU due to a number of overriding factors, but they are nonetheless involved in political cooperation in terms of exchanges and crisis management, and have been continuously discussing political integration. ASEAN, for example, has, in consultation or partnership with the UN, taken on peacekeeping roles, and has also expanded to set up an institutional dialogue moving towards a goal of political integration. Likewise, MERCOSUR's political co-operation has been intense and effective, involving the protection of democratic institutions, diplomatic peace-making interventions, and the adoption of a common standpoint in global affairs.

Challenges for Possible Political Integration

GCC member states, alongside much of the Arab word, have worked to increase political preparedness in order to play a key role in drafting the new regional map. While some efforts have been made to create a political union in the region, the problem in the Gulf remains that the majority (elites and civil society) agree on the need for a reform process, but nobody understands how to drive the process itself.[67] Also lacking is a consideration of the political reform movement from an internal GCC perspective, namely, how the debate regarding a more participatory and equitable form of political representation is viewed and formulated within Gulf societies themselves.[68] Similarly, aspirations for political participation vary from country to country, because of differences in economic structures and development.

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[67]Abdulaziz Sager, 'Political Reform Measures from a Domestic GCC Perspective,' in Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2006), 17.

[68]Sager, 17

Ideally, the GCC could envisage concession and counter concession among members within a framework of common objectives and interests; however, tense national feelings continue to obstruct GCC coherence. Cooperative efforts have accomplished very little (with the exception of the Arab Spring), as the GCC's achievements have mostly come through bilateral agreements that have solved several border disputes, but have not been permanent in nature, and lacking any initiative or unanimity to integrate.[69] Some small aspects of integration have been achieved in the common regulations of economic activity, while more informal cooperation is practised on matters of internal security.

A number of challenges therefore remain that would limit possible political integration in the GCC. These challenges need to be dealt with in the early stages of possible talks, and can be summed as follows:

1. Policy formulation in the Gulf States requires that the elite play a key role in decision making in order to assuage fears that integration—even straightforward efforts at alignment of economic and financial affairs, customs and communications, education and culture—[70] might reduce the independence of national decision-making.[71] In the regional context, states of the GCC also fear that meaningful political integration would only enhance prospective Saudi hegemony down the line.

2. At its inception, the GCC did not discuss issues relating to military and political coordination thereby limiting political cooperation and unified responses to direct challenges or unexpected changes as was seen during the response to the Arab Spring.

3. Internal security threats in the early years of the GCC stemmed from various socio-political factors such as territorial disputes (which are deeply rooted in the culture of the region), and issues around immigration that came with the development of the rentier state. These factors existed even before the

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[69]Hamad.

[70] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'Regional Security Cooperation in the smaller Gulf states,' *NOREF Policy Brief,* (November 2012), www.peacebuilding.no/.../791902c5d2673a09d00ff78a1a405bcc.pdf

[71]Patrick, *The GCC States*, 2.

establishment of the GCC, and if not dealt with alongside political reforms, may hinder the process of any possible integration.

4. The GCC's regional 'institutionalization,' as reflected in its regional decision making process, has not yet seen integration develop as a norm, even if ad hoc cooperation has been created. There is no 'multi-layered governance' in the GCC or sustainable intergovernmental activity among member states. There is also no basic definition or agenda for political coordination either between states or under the umbrella of the organization.

5. Under normal conditions member states prefer regional arrangements, from which it is easier to withdraw and in which decisions can be made by unanimity. Only under exceptional circumstances will integration be discussed.

6. Most of the theoretical, empirical, and practical studies on integration have looked at the experience of the European Community. The theoretical assumptions, hypotheses, measurements, verification tools, and derived conclusions for the concept of integration have thus tended to be socially, politically, and economically conditioned by Western Europe.[72] In a non-European setting, essential factors often differ, from economic underdevelopment, to the role of traditional factors and the vulnerability of the region to external influence.

Therefore, integration as a GCC initiative will require concerted and long-term planning. Efforts might require institutional reforms that deal with distribution and enforcement; a tribunal system to deal with adjudication and; procedures for negotiations to find equitable solutions.[73] Political reforms need to be sustained in the domestic field, and may thereby require the GCC to play its part in creating a solution of both mutually beneficial and sustainable internal security.

Conclusion

As a way forward for possible political integration, each GCC member state needs to prioritise the role of the organisation in maintaining peace, particularly when it comes to

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[72]Alasfoor, 45.

[73]Finn Laursen, 'Regional Integration: Some Introductory Reflections,' in Finn Laursen, ed., *Comparative Regional Integration: Europe and beyond* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, May 2010), 7.

domestic reforms. The structures of the GCC should become more present within each sovereign state through the establishment of agencies and representatives within each government. Qatar already has a Department of GCC Affairs, Bahrain has an undersecretary for Regional and GCC Affairs, and Kuwait has the Department of Managing the Affairs of the GCC in its Ministry of External Affairs. However, more proactive engagements need to be put forward.

The years after the Arab Spring has seen agreement amongst GCC States that parliamentary structures in all member countries need to be strengthened through training and the provision of resources to inform and guide the legislative process. To this end, the GCC has initiated discussions on the role of women in political participation, by holding regional conferences to demonstrate the recent increase in the number of women parliamentarians and women in decision-making positions. Alongside the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, a conference on the GCC National and Regional Security has been established, to understand security related challenges in the region with the aim to make recommendations towards a collective GCC security strategic concept.[74]

The GCC needs to look beyond the idea of security and cooperation and focus on its internal security threats, and how to solve them collectively. Current municipal conferences among GCC states only focus on waste management, environment, urban areas, and electronic services, and should instead put focus on the immediate political issues of establishing a parliamentarian committee and an anti-corruption committee. Understanding the challenges of each state, establishing scholarly and policy networks through funding and conferences can be the first step towards this goal. There needs to be more co-ordination and exchange of information among the Gulf's parliamentary bodies, as a way to foster an exchange of ideas and information on parliamentary procedures and practices of the region. A greatly enhanced civil society program is needed to inform citizens of their rights alongside an effort to improve bureaucracy. A strategy must be designed to change public perceptions of the position of women within society, to create role models for future generations, and endorsements must be made supporting the entry of women into public life.

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[74] 'GCC National and Regional Security conference kicks off,' April 23, 2014, http://www.mpf.gov.bh/en/press-releases/gcc-national-and-regional-security-conference-kicks-off.html

Since the majority of citizens in GCC States aspire to reform, and civil societies across the region have expressed their desire to contribute ideas for their country's development, governments must appreciate and harness the constructive potential of crisis situations to drive future development.[75] In order for such integrative processes to proceed, however, GCC countries need the will to enact domestic reform faster, so as to overcome existing drawbacks to their internal reform procedures. These should be guided through deliberative interaction and policy coordination. This policy coordination may involve the continuous adjustment of policies in order to achieve a common objective, such as political reforms that have become integral challenges to security of each GCC state.[76] Most importantly, it is imperative to open a new chapter of serious political dialogue that will require bold measures for sustainability.

To do this, regional integration agreements rather than simple regional cooperation are key. The current crisis must be met with political reforms to guarantee internal security, and a centralised but semi-independent political decision-making body led by the GCC alongside experts on various political issues. This is the answer to meaningful reformation and the overall development of the GCC region.

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[75]'Political and Economic Scenarios for the GCC,' *Chatham House Workshop Summary,* (May 2012): 2, www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/.../public/.../0512gcc_summarytwo.pdf

[76]Raghida Dergham, 'Security Concerns and Political Reform in the GCC,' *The Huffington Post* May 21, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/raghida-dergham/security-concerns-and-pol_b_865126.html

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