



The Gulf Goes Global: the evolving role of Gulf countries in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond

KRISTIAN COATES ULRICHSEN

*Dr Kristian Coates Ulrichsen is Research Fellow, Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University.

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»» As the turmoil across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) enters its fourth year, the role of Gulf countries in influencing the processes of change in the MENA region has evolved substantially. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Qatar have all developed assertive regional policies towards states in political transition and supported fellow monarchical regimes in Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Morocco. These policies have been crafted against the backdrop of rising uncertainty about the future role of the United States in the Middle East as the Obama administration ‘pivots toward Asia’, and deeper shifts in the structure and balance of geo-economic power. New approaches to issues of global governance are altering the parameters of engagement and multilateral cooperation as Gulf actors become further embedded in inter-governmental frameworks.

The rise of Gulf actors as partners of influence and growing reach across the MENA injects new considerations into how regional and international organisations can best engage with each other, as well as with aid recipients, which in the cases outlined in this paper, are states undergoing periods of profound political and economic transition. On a broad level, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations must acknowledge that the changing architecture of world politics means that power and influence will be dispersed among a greater number of active participants, many of whom will be non-Western and also authoritarian in nature. This raises the prospect that the normative foundations of the international system – from governance and political reform, as well as transparency and accountability – may increasingly be seen through a prism that diverges from what may be termed a ‘Western-centric’ set of global norms.

For states in transition, this opens up new possibilities with regard to the political and economic choices facing new (and re-empowered) policy elites. The scope and scale of Gulf assistance to Egypt provides a clear example of the practical and policy implications of this process in action. The Egyptian example also highlights how Gulf actors are not impartial in choosing how and to whom to provide aid. On the contrary, first Qatar, and subsequently Saudi Arabia and the UAE backed different sides in the post-Mubarak maelstrom of Egyptian politics. Although the sums proffered were far larger than those from international agencies and had fewer conditions attached to them, they were linked indelibly to particular political *currents* rather than being tied to *outcomes* such as governance

reforms or improvements in transparency. Many of the Qatari pledges to Egypt did not materialise once the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government was toppled in July 2013, just as initial Saudi and Emirati support to the immediate post-Mubarak military government were suspended when Mohammad Morsi was elected president in June 2012.

Funding and development agencies in the Gulf have long records of providing aid and assistance to the wider region, rooted in Islamic principles of charitable giving as well as humanitarian principles more generally. What has changed since the start of the Arab uprisings is that Gulf States' regional and foreign policy has become more assertive and overtly connected with attempts to influence, if not control, the pace and direction of change in transition states. Greater understanding among policy-makers of the differences of approach will assist officials in identifying avenues of practical cooperation. These will be more likely to succeed along issue-specific lines, such as participation in international working groups (on Syria or Yemen, for example) that can pool resources from a diverse range of actors in pursuit of a common (and manageable) objective. Leveraging Gulf support in this manner can form the basis for the subsequent expansion of multilateral cooperation by enhancing the familiarity and trust of all stakeholders as attention turns to the intricate – and long-term – challenges of stabilisation in MENA states.

Toward this objective, this working paper examines how coalitions of emerging economies are creating new and more organised inter- and intra-regional linkages. It explores how these new ties are reshaping the international relations of the MENA region as countries in the Gulf are exercising greater leverage through financial and energy resources both to fund and participate in international institutions and to steer the direction and pace of political and economic transitions in the Arab world. An opening section will map the economic globalisation of the Gulf as rapidly-thickening political, economic, and latterly security ties have integrated the region into a wider hinterland spanning Asia, Africa, and even parts of southern Europe. This leads into a second section that contextualises the rise of the Gulf States as regional powers with international reach into the broader rebalancing of the global order. Crucially for MENA states, this coincides with a change of geo-strategic priorities for the US as the focus of attention and resources moves inexorably to Asia-Pacific, as described in the third section of this paper. Together, the trends captured in the opening three sections present an array of opportunities for emerging powers such as the Gulf States to increase and diversify their engagement in the Middle East and North Africa.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections utilise a range of examples to document how changing international patterns are working their way through regional governance frameworks and issues, examine the political purpose behind Gulf financial support for transition states, and assess their implications for policy-making in the region. Specific examples will address the range and the nature of Gulf States' interventions in MENA countries during and after the 2011 Arab spring. These will analyse the impact of Gulf funding and support on prospects for reform, human rights, and transparency in MENA transition states, as well as assess and generate policy options for international governmental and non-governmental organisations that are seeking to secure and support the institutionalisation of 'global norms' in transition states. A final section offers concluding thoughts on the formulation of policies that can best accommodate and incorporate diverging viewpoints and end-objectives among the growing circle of regional and international partners with a stake in the 'new' Middle East.

The Gulf States in economic globalisation

›› The awarding of the hosting rights to the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar on 2 December 2010 symbolised for outside observers the rapid rise of the GCC states as regional powers with global reach. Their emergence in the 2000s came against the backdrop of an international order in flux as the post-1945 institutions and mechanisms of global governance struggled to maintain their relevance in a polycentric world. The broadening and deepening of political and economic connections between the Gulf States and Asian partners have been of particular importance. These ties have opened up alternative pathways of global integration pivoting around ‘coalitions of convenience’ of groups of major emerging economies. Such diversification of geopolitical and geo-economic interests represents a significant juncture in the internationalisation of the Gulf in the globalised age.

It is instructive to note that the ties binding the Gulf States into both the global economy and networks of South-South Cooperation are deep-rooted. For decades, oil exports have integrated the Gulf States firmly into the international economic system as Gulf oil became a motor of Western economic growth in the post-World War II era. Securing stable access to regional supplies and the Western guarantees of security that underpinned this became the pillars that structured the international relations of the Gulf after 1945. Oil from the Gulf, particularly Kuwait, supplied 51 per cent of British requirements in 1971, while Saudi Arabia and the United States enjoyed a similarly symbiotic relationship. Mutual economic interdependencies bound the oil-producing Gulf States into the world economy and predated the acceleration of economic globalisation in the 1970s and global interconnections in the 1990s.¹

The rapid rise in global oil prices in the 1970s enabled the Gulf countries to project their influence onto the international arena. Although this accelerated rapidly after 2000 and acquired a global dimension, the region has a particularly long record of integration into South-South frameworks. This occurred through the provision of generous developmental assistance to predominantly Arab and Islamic recipients. Aid contributions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE averaged between six and eight per cent of their gross national incomes between 1974 and 1979, as compared to one-third of one per cent for developed countries.² Shortly after independence, Kuwait and the UAE established formal governmental donor agencies for Arab Economic Development that distributed large sums of money through largely bilateral channels. In Saudi Arabia, King Faisal built an infrastructure of Islamic organisations, such as the Muslim World League (1962), the Organisation for the Islamic Conference (1972) and the International Islamic Relief Organisation (1975). These enhanced Saudi status in the wider Islamic world-community,

1. A. Ehteshami, *Globalisation and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.110.

2. S. Barakat and S. Zuck, ‘Gulf State Assistance to Conflict-Affected Environments’, *LSE Kuwait Program Working Paper 10*, July 2010, p.7.

but also promoted a conservative and sometimes militant brand of Islam whose influence spread far beyond the borders of the kingdom.³

Accelerating processes of globalisation in the 1990s and 2000s gave rise to new forms of political economy and engagement in multiple layers of global governance. New globalising flows of capital and labour, shifts in geo-economic strength and changing patterns of trade began to rebalance power relations across the world. Gulf communities became connected to leading conduits of ‘global politics’, with the aim of addressing a broad range of global challenges.⁴ All of the GCC states, culminating in Saudi Arabia in 2005, acceded to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and began to attract significantly greater flows of foreign direct investment (FDI). In addition, they promoted themselves as financial hubs for the wider West Asian and North African region. During the 2002-8 oil price boom, a combination of oil reserves and capital accumulation positioned the oil-rich Gulf States (notably Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE) as a strategic and commercial pivot around which shifts in the global balance of power were taking place.⁵

The Gulf region’s share of global oil and natural gas production is projected to increase from 28 per cent (including Iraqi and Iranian output) in 2000 to 33 per cent in 2020. With most of that increase going to Asian markets, the GCC states will continue to diversify and broaden economic interdependencies.⁶ Already, the majority of oil exported from the UAE goes eastward to Asia, as does a rapidly-increasing share of Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG). China alone accounted for nearly 40 per cent of the increase in world oil consumption between 2004 and 2007, and is forecast to account for a further 40 per cent of the increase in world demand for oil through 2030.⁷ In 2009, moreover, it surpassed the United States in the volume of oil imported from Saudi Arabia for the first time.⁸ This symbolic milestone underscored the internationalisation of the Gulf through the rise of new linkages with emerging economies everywhere.

Thickening economic linkages with Russia, China, India, and South and East Asian nations shifted the orientation of the GCC states eastward. Although political and security ties with the United States and Western Europe remained intact, an internationalisation of the Gulf occurred through deepening energy interdependencies and changes in the direction of non-oil trade flows in petrochemicals, plastics and aluminium with Asian partners. Practical manifestation of the accelerating ‘Gulf-Asia’ nexus of primarily (but not exclusively) economic relations included broadening multi-sectoral linkages, as well as greater flows of FDI, technology transfer, and integration into inter-regional and global production and supply chains.⁹ These took place as the large-scale programmes of economic diversification that were unveiled in every GCC state in the 2000s created powerful new

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3. M. Al-Rasheed, *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers* (London: Hurst & Co, 2008), p.101.
 4. D. Held and A. McGrew, ‘Introduction,’ in D. Held and A. McGrew (eds.), *Governing Globalisation: Power, Autonomy and Global Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p.5.
 5. K. Coates Ulrichsen, ‘Rebalancing Global Governance: Gulf States’ Perspectives on the Governance of Globalisation’, *Global Policy* 2(1), 2011, p.65.
 6. F. Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.264.
 7. B. Simpfendorfer, *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World is Turning Away From the West and Rediscovering China* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.30-2.
 8. ‘China’s Growth Shifts the Geopolitics of Oil’, *The New York Times*, 19 March 2010.
 9. M. Yamada, ‘Gulf-Asia Relations as “Post-Rentier” Diversification? The Case of the Petrochemical Industry in Saudi Arabia’, *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1(2), 2011, pp.101-3.

integrative linkages with the global economy. The GCC states became leading centres of production for a variety of industries, ranging from petrochemicals and aluminium to cement and construction products. By 2008, they accounted for 12 per cent of global petrochemical production, and more complex industrial ties developed with emerging and industrialised economies across the world.¹⁰

The warming of commercial and financial ties between the GCC states and Asian partners is led by (but not limited to) the burgeoning Saudi-Chinese nexus. Having only established diplomatic relations as recently as 1990, economic links initially centred around hydrocarbons, with a Strategic Oil Cooperation agreement in 1999 paving the way for Saudi Arabia to become China's leading oil supplier by 2002. In the 2000s, the volume of investment and trade between all GCC states and China surged through initiatives such as the Kuwait-China Investment Company (KCIC – established in 2005) and the revival of interest in a GCC-China free trade agreement (FTA) in 2009.¹¹ In the same year, a 25-year agreement to provide five million tonnes per year of LNG was reached between Qatargas and the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC). This created a long-term interdependency, reflecting (in the words of CNOOC President Fu Chengyu) the 'great complementarities' between the two countries, as 'China can guarantee a long-term reliable market for Qatar, while Qatar can be a stable supplier for [the] Chinese market.'¹²

Significantly, Gulf-Asian relations have moved far beyond the hydrocarbons sector, although that clearly remains important. An example is the substantial rise in Gulf-China capital investments and joint ventures over the past decade. A mutual upstream-downstream interdependence has formed as the GCC states invest in Chinese oil refining and petrochemical industries, and China increases investment in Gulf States' financial, construction, and energy sectors.¹³ Similar to the Kuwait-China Investment Company, the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) drew up a strategic 'China plan' intended to create strong supply partnerships and joint ventures that can meet China's rapidly growing demand.¹⁴ Under new President Xi Jinping, China is making the MENA region a strategic and commercial priority as it seeks greater political contact to complement China's role as the world's second-largest economy, and the third round of the China-GCC Strategic Dialogue is being planned for 2015.¹⁵ Other burgeoning bilateral relationships include the proliferation of connections between the UAE and South Korea with the 2009 awarding of the construction of Abu Dhabi's four civilian nuclear power reactors to the Korean Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO).¹⁶

Region-wide, the GCC as a trading bloc also became more globalised and integrated during the 2000s oil-price boom in terms of level of capital outflows and inflows. Dubai, especially, developed into a regional financial centre against stiff competition from Qatar and Bahrain, leveraging its advantageous geographical location to enable it to cover the wide area between



10. J.F. Seznec, 'Financing Industrialization in the Arab-Persian Gulf', in J.F. Seznec and M. Kirk (eds.), *Industrialization in the Gulf: A Socioeconomic Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.30.

11. S. Yetiv and C. Lu, 'China, Global Energy and the Middle East', *Middle East Journal* 61(2), 2007, p.5.

12. 'Qatar, China in 25-year Gas Deal', *The Peninsula*, 8 March 2009.

13. M. Ghafouri, 'China's Policy in the Persian Gulf', *Middle East Policy* 16(2), 2009, p.89.

14. Yetiv and Lu, *op. cit.*, pp.207-8.

15. 'China's New Leaders Look to Consolidate GCC Link', *Gulf States Newsletter* 37(959), 28 November 2011, p.5.

16. 'Abu Dhabi Signs Nuclear Power Deal with South Korean Group', *The National*, 28 December 2009.

the European and East Asian exchanges. Economic diversification initiatives started to deliver accelerating growth in the non-oil sector and resulted in the private sector now accounting for nearly one-third of GDP in Abu Dhabi alone. Dubai, Bahrain, and Kuwait all looked toward, and applied, elements of the ‘East Asian model’ in their development plans during the 2000s. Officials in all three states/emirates expressed close interest in Singapore’s proactive and successful leadership and combination of state guidance with private initiative.¹⁷

Underway before 2008, the global economic crisis hastened the links between the Gulf and emerging powers as Asian economies led the world out of recession and recovered market share at the expense of Western competitors.

Initial hopes that the global financial and economic crisis might bypass the Gulf proved misplaced in late-2008 as oil prices plunged, project financing dried up, and the real estate speculative bubble burst.¹⁸ Individual Gulf countries felt the impact in different ways. In Dubai, the crisis exposed the fragility of its economic diversification based on the real estate industry, high-end tourist development, and the financial sector, underpinned by conglomerates such as Dubai World and Dubai Holding relying on continuous foreign direct investment and access to cheap international credit.¹⁹ Kuwaiti financial institutions were exposed to a combination of weakening domestic property markets, local equity markets, and the tightening of international credit. Saudi Arabia was hit by a financial scandal involving two of its largest family-run conglomerates (Saad Group and Ahmad Hamad AlGosaibi and Brothers) in May 2009. The dispute over some \$20 billion of ‘lost loans’ sucked in more than 80 domestic, regional, and international banks, including Citigroup and BNP Paribas, as well as the Supreme Court of New York State, the Cayman Islands, and the High Court in London.²⁰

Despite these setbacks, the GCC states emerged from the crisis in relatively better condition than many of their counterparts in the industrialised Western economies. After weathering the initial shock, regional financial institutions proved more resilient than many had expected. Central banks and sovereign wealth funds (led by the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Qatar Investment Authority) eased the pressure on local banks by investing up to \$350 billion in 2008-9.²¹ Oil prices rebounded from lows of \$30 per barrel in early 2009 to again exceed \$100 per barrel in 2011, and remain at that level until the time of writing in late 2013. However, the resulting gains to Gulf economies were offset by inexorably rising budget break-even requirements as governments ramped up welfare and social expenditure in a bid to pre-empt Arab spring unrest at home.²² Qatar and the UAE (and Saudi Arabia to a lesser extent) still remained regional and even global leaders in aviation, shipping, and logistics.²³

17. Martin Hvidt, ‘The Dubai Model: An Outline of Key Development-Process Elements in Dubai’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41(3), 2009, p.399.

18. ‘Gulf’s Oil Wealth to Help Cushion Impact of Likely Global Recession’, *Gulf Times*, 17 October 2008.

19. C. Davidson, ‘The Dubai Model: Diversification and Slowdown’, in M. Kamrava (ed.), *The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp.214-17.

20. ‘Family Groups in Gulf Must Embrace Corporate Governance’, *The Peninsula*, 23 June 2009; ‘Significant Steps in Long-Running Dispute between Al Gosaibi Family and Maan Al Sanea’, *The National*, 24 April 2011.

21. M. Raghu, ‘Future Direction of the GCC Financial Sector – A Specific Look at Banking and Asset Management’, in E. Woertz (ed.), *GCC Financial Market* (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2011), pp.25-6.

22. S. Hertog, ‘The Costs of Counter-Revolution in the Gulf’, *Foreign Policy*, 31 May 2011.

23. ‘Aviation in the Gulf: Rulers of the New Silk Road’, *The Economist*, 3-9 June 2010.

Particularly during the early phase of the financial crisis, Gulf-based sovereign wealth funds were also important sources of liquidity for Western financial institutions such as Merrill Lynch, Barclays Bank, and Citigroup. During autumn 2008, they accounted for no less than one-third of the emergency funding that was made available by European governments in their initial response to the financial crisis.²⁴ Gulf sovereign wealth funds also acquired high-profile stakes in iconic global brands such as Harrods, Porsche, and Ferrari. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi and Qatar began to carve out specialist niches to become world leaders in specific fields, such as renewable energy and clean energy research respectively, in part through careful leveraging of financial reserves and investment policy.²⁵

The rapid rise of sovereign wealth funds highlighted several of the underlying transitions in the global economy. Pre-crisis estimates of their value and potential trajectory proved to be over-estimations that were subsequently eroded further by losses sustained during the downturn.²⁶ Nevertheless, they do possess significant holdings, and have been perceived to be part of the wider shift of economic leverage from West to East and from the market to the state in the allocation of capital.²⁷ Over summer 2012, Qatar Holding's muscular deployment of its shareholding in the international commodity trading and mining company Xstrata during its merger negotiations with rival Glencore was a demonstration of this power in practice.²⁸ Moreover, the rise of Russian and Chinese funds, in particular, heightened anxieties over the origin of sovereign investment flows. This contributed to wariness in investment-recipient countries, notably the United States, regarding the potential for political motivations driving investment decision-making. By far, the most egregious example of this has been the visceral reaction to the 2006 Dubai Ports World takeover of a ports management contract in the United States.²⁹

The Gulf States and global governance

»» The favourable economic trends described above left policy-makers in the Gulf in a stronger position to re-tap global trade flows and shifting geo-economic trajectories once the immediate impact of the 2007-8 financial crisis had passed. Building on their more active role in economic globalisation, GCC policy-makers became more dynamic participants in practical measures related to the governance of globalisation in the aftermath of the crash. In large part, this involved the Gulf States coming together

24. R. Youngs, 'Impasse in Euro-Gulf Relations', *FRIDE Working Paper* 80, 2009, p.1.

25. C. Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London, Hurst & Co, 2009), p.76; A.H. Gulbrandsen, 'Bridging the Gulf: Qatari Business Diplomacy and Conflict Mediation', MA thesis, Georgetown University, 2010, p.75.

26. J.F. Seznec, 'The Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds: Myths and Reality', *Middle East Policy* 5(2), 2008, p.105.

27. S. Behrendt, 'Beyond Santiago: Status and Prospects', *Central Banking* 19(4), 2009, p.76.

28. 'Qatar to Oppose Glencore-Xstrata Merger', *Financial Times*, 30 August 2012.

29. K.C. Ulrichsen, 'Repositioning the GCC States in the Changing Global Order', *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1(2), 2011, p.234.

with other major emerging economies to create ‘coalitions of convenience’ around specific issues relating to the reformulation of frameworks of global governance. The two principal areas where this occurred were in international financial institutions and energy governance.

Saudi Arabia received international praise for its role in stabilising world oil markets in late 2008 and early 2009. It also used its seat on the G20 and on the board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to call for changes to the international financial architecture. During autumn 2008, Saudi and other Gulf States’ policy-makers expressed their irritation at assumptions that they would unquestionably contribute to IMF rescue packages. In November 2008, Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf rebuffed visiting British Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s suggestion that the kingdom and other oil-rich nations increase their contributions to the IMF. Dismissing rumours that ‘we were coming here to pay the bill’, al-Assaf stated that ‘We are not going to pay more or less than others. We have been playing our role responsibly and we will continue to play our role, but we are not going to finance the institutions just because we have large reserves’.³⁰ One week later, the Governor of the UAE Central Bank, Nasser al-Suwaidi, offered a blunter perspective that outlined Gulf States’ interests and motivations: ‘If they [GCC states] are given more voice then they will provide money maybe [...] They will not be providing funds without extra voice and extra recognition’.³¹

In the run-up to the second meeting of the G20 in April 2009, the contours of a loose new alignment of emerging economies converged around calls to redress a representational imbalance in the international financial architecture. Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Saudi Arabia in February 2009 and pledged to work with the GCC ‘with a view to reforming the global financial institutions’.³² Shortly thereafter, Saudi Finance Minister al-Assaf made it clear that the kingdom advocated an increase in its shares and voting rights in international financial institutions.³³ Working closely with the other BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), Saudi Arabia came to share a platform intended to counter-balance perceived US leadership in the global system.³⁴ Ahead of the third G20 meeting in Pittsburgh in September 2009, al-Assaf joined with the BRICs in supporting a proposal to increase emerging economies’ representation in the IMF that would more accurately reflect their weight in the global economy, and later linked Saudi support for incoming IMF Director Christine Lagarde to a greater redistribution of voting rights within the organisation.³⁵

Qatar and the UAE also became involved in new frameworks of energy and climate change governance. A case in point was Qatar’s hosting of the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP 18), marketed as the Doha Climate Change Conference, in November 2012.³⁶ Abu Dhabi campaigned hard to win the right to host the headquarters of the International Renewable Energy Agency in 2009. Symbolically, it marked the first time that an international agency

30. ‘Saudi Arabia Not Mulling More Cash for IMF: Minister’, *Reuters*, 16 November 2008.

31. ‘Gulf Should Get More Voice for Extra IMF Funds’, *Gulf Times*, 22 November 2008.

32. ‘China to Boost Relations with GCC: President Hu’, *Arab News*, 12 February 2009.

33. ‘Saudi Govt Steps Up Loans to Companies’, *Saudi Gazette*, 15 March 2009.

34. ‘BRIC’s Get Down to Business in Yekaterinburg’, *Russia Today*, 15 June 2009.

35. ‘Saudi Says IMF Reforms Should Not Be at its Expense’, *The Peninsula*, 5 September 2009.

36. K.C. Ulrichsen, ‘The GCC States and the Shifting Balance of Global Power’, *Occasional Paper 6*, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Center for International and Regional Studies, 2010, p.1.

had established itself in the Middle East, although Abu Dhabi's successful bid was buttressed by the promise of up to \$135 million in cash pledges and in-kind assistance to the new agency.³⁷ Qatar, meanwhile, took the lead in upgrading the Gas Exporting Countries Forum into an inter-governmental organisation, as well as headquartering it and hosting its annual ministerial meetings with fellow gas-producers such as Russia, Iran, and Venezuela.³⁸

Additionally, Qatar joined with Switzerland and Singapore in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Redesign Initiative (GRI). This organisation was set up to channel the views of 28 small and medium-sized states into the G20 process and also spawned a Global Governance Group (3G).³⁹ Qatar hosted a Global Redesign Summit that took place in Doha on 30-31 May 2010, producing a final communiqué entitled *Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World*. This outlined 'the parameters of an optimal system of global cooperation as well as a set of pragmatic, actionable steps in specific areas of international cooperation'. Qatar additionally hosted one of the initiative's three supplementary hearings, focusing on energy security governance (the other two hearings were hosted by Switzerland on UN reform and by Singapore on Asia's role in global governance).⁴⁰

New geopolitical context: the Gulf States and the US

»» Set against this backdrop of greater Gulf engagement in international affairs is the gradual reorientation of US foreign policy, away from the Middle East and toward Asia-Pacific. While the much-touted 'pivot to Asia' has generated much comment and is not about to signify a US disengagement from the Gulf or the wider region, it does nevertheless illuminate the trajectory of policy-making within the Obama White House. A major strategic rebalancing is underway that reflects how the Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a new geopolitical centre of gravity. A recent study on the 'pivot' summarised how, 'as regional power balances have shifted and US global priorities have changed, Washington's strategy toward the region has likewise evolved'. This has encompassed multiple dimensions, including a free trade agreement between the US and South Korea, sustained negotiations to expand and enhance the Trans-Pacific Partnership, participation in the East Asia Summit, closer military cooperation with the Philippines, and the deployment of additional US troops to Australia and Singapore.⁴¹

37. M. Luomi, 'Abu Dhabi's Alternative-Energy Initiatives: Seizing Climate Change Opportunities', *Middle East Policy* 16(4), 2009, pp.113-14.

38. J. Dargin, 'Qatar's Natural Gas: The Foreign Policy Driver', *Middle East Policy* 14(3), 2007, pp.141-2.

39. Cooper and Shaw, op. cit., p.xix.

40. R. Samans, K. Schwab, and M. Malloch-Brown (eds.), *Global Redesign: Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2010).

41. A. Denmark, 'Regional Perspectives on U.S. Strategic Rebalancing', *Asia Policy* 15(1), 2013, p.2.

Although unconnected with the wider strategic realignment, US relations with its Gulf partners have come under unprecedented strain during the Obama presidency. Beginning with the withdrawal of US support for embattled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the start of the Arab spring and continuing with (muted) US criticism over the security crackdown in Bahrain as the Al-Khalifa ruling family contained the pro-democracy movement with GCC support, officials in the GCC states began to question US motives as never before. As early as May 2011, influential Saudi foreign policy commentator Nawaf Obaid wrote of a ‘tectonic’ shift in the US-Saudi relationship and lamented that ‘Washington has shown itself in recent months to be an unwilling and unreliable partner’ against the supposed regional threat from Iran. In a sign of the growing autonomy of Saudi and other Gulf States’ policy calculations, Obaid warned that ‘in areas in which Saudi national security or strategic interests are at stake, the Kingdom will pursue its own agenda’.⁴²

As Gulf States’ frustrations with vacillating US policy toward the Arab spring mounted in 2012 and 2013, declaratory and policy pronouncements became shriller. The failure to take military action against the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria following the 21 August 2013 use of chemical weapons in Ghouta was greeted with dismay in GCC capitals, as were the signs of a rapprochement between the US and Iran following the election of Hassan Rouhani as president in June 2013. Saudi Arabia’s decision to turn down one of the 10 rotating, non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council weeks after snubbing the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly revealed the depth of regional alarm at the direction of US policy in the Middle East. The extent of unease became abundantly clear in a characteristically blunt interview given by billionaire Saudi businessman Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Al-Saud to the *Wall Street Journal* in November 2013, when he stated that the kingdom was exerting ‘maximum pressure now on the United States not to succumb to the president of Iran’s soft talk’ and added belligerently that ‘The US has to have a foreign policy, well-defined well-structured. You don’t have it right now, unfortunately. It’s just completely chaos, confusion’.⁴³

Two macro-factors therefore came together to shape the evolving role of GCC-centred actors in the Middle East and North Africa. These can broadly be defined as the matching of Gulf States’ *growing capabilities* with more expansive *policy intent*. As the examples in the following sections make clear, the emergence of the Gulf States as visible global actors predated the Arab spring, but also accelerated and acquired a potent regional dimension once the initial shock of the upheaval had subsided. From direct support to Bahrain and Oman to political and financial support to regimes in North Africa and rebel groups in Syria and Libya, the GCC states became major players in shaping the regional transition. Improved awareness of how Gulf-based entities see their engagement with MENA states and societies will assist representatives of all concerned regional and international partners to ensure that their initiatives are timely, targeted, and not subject to misunderstanding or pushback.

42. ‘Leading Saudi Researcher Warns West of a Newly Assertive Saudi Arabia’, *Gulf States Newsletter* 35(901), 27 May 2011, p.8.

43. S. Henderson, ‘No One in the Region Will Sleep’, *The Atlantic*, 25 November 2013.

Impact of Gulf States' funding in the MENA region

>> The GCC states took the lead in responding to the unprecedented political and economic changes triggered by the Arab spring. Saudi Arabia announced generous financial aid packages to Bahrain and Oman, Egypt and Jordan, pledging \$10 billion aid packages to the former two countries, \$5 billion to Jordan, and significant bilateral assistance to Morocco.⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah also engineered the surprising offer of GCC membership to Jordan and Morocco in May 2011 before announcing his aspiration for closer 'Gulf Union' at the GCC Summit in Riyadh in December. However, despite the Saudi foreign minister fleshing out the proposals for an integrated military and regional security policy, an extraordinary mid-year GCC Consultative Summit in Riyadh on 14 May 2012 failed to reach consensus, as the rulers of Oman and the UAE did not even attend the meeting.⁴⁵ In December 2013, Oman's foreign minister reaffirmed his country's opposition to participating in any moves toward a Gulf Union by announcing that Oman was prepared to withdraw from the GCC if necessary.⁴⁶

Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE therefore reacted to the outbreak of political upheaval by developing policies of far greater assertiveness in a bid at least to control the trajectories of change that seemed to be cascading throughout the region in 2011. In addition, GCC assistance mushroomed at a time when austerity packages and cost-cutting measures in Western states have reduced their capacity to engage at anything like the same level; this is especially pertinent in the case of southern European states' (in)ability to take the lead in addressing the transitions underway in their immediate 'strategic neighbourhood' in North Africa or the Levant. A combination of Gulf States' abundant resources, linguistic and cultural connection, and geographical proximity thus propelled them to the forefront of regional engagement, requiring Western actors, whether governmental, humanitarian, or civil society organisations, to become familiar with a frequently diverging set of operational procedures or broader objectives.

The case of Egypt is worthy of closer study as it is not only the largest and most direct recipient of GCC states' assistance, but also because it highlights the complexities and competing agendas embedded within such support. After the 2011 revolution that ousted President Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Arabia and the UAE backed the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces with financial support and diplomatic recognition. Officials in both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi opted for regime-type continuity in a bid to limit the impact of such rapid and unexpected political change. The UAE pledged US\$3 billion in aid to Egypt in 2011, while Saudi Arabia approved US\$430 million in assistance from the Saudi Fund for Development and gave Egypt access to a US\$750 million line of credit to import oil products in June 2012, shortly before the Egyptian presidential election resulted in victory for the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁷ With Mohammed

44. 'Kuwait Transfers \$250m to Jordan's Central Bank', *ArabianBusiness.com*, 7 October 2012.

45. 'Summit Fails to Agree on Gulf Union', *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(924), 24 May 2012, pp.5-6.

46. 'Oman Steers the Agenda Before GCC Summit', *Gulf News*, 8 December 2013.

47. 'Difficult Geopolitical Context', *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(926), 21 June 2012, p.2.

Morsi, relations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia abruptly cooled while Qatar stepped in to provide the new Egyptian government with more than US\$7.5 billion in emergency loans, direct financial aid, and shipments of liquefied natural gas.⁴⁸

The sudden removal of President Morsi and the return of military-led rule to Egypt in July 2013 was followed by immediate and large-scale pledges of assistance by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. Over US\$12 billion was promised in the week after the counter-coup alone, and was quickly disbursed, unlike many pledges of GCC aid in other circumstances. By late-October 2013, the UAE had, for example, assembled a comprehensive economic package totalling US\$4.9 billion, consisting of a US\$1 billion grant transferred to the Egyptian government in July, US\$1 billion in petroleum products to help meet Egypt's fuel and hydrocarbon needs, and US\$2.9 billion in aid for development and infrastructure projects designed to revive Egypt's ailing economy.⁴⁹

Gulf provision of aid and development financing (in all its guises) prevented the total collapse of the Egyptian economy amid three years of near-constant political turmoil and steep falls in vital economic sectors, such as tourism. However, seen from an international 'good governance' perspective, the aid from GCC states is more problematic in terms of the policy choices it has enabled Egyptian officials to make or, just as importantly, to avoid. In addition to reducing pressure on the government to seek a US\$4.8 billion loan from the IMF, as Morsi had been doing, Gulf support allowed the Egyptian finance minister to avoid having to raise taxes or cut public spending by utilising the incoming monies to cut its burgeoning budget deficit. While this meant that further volatility could be temporarily avoided by putting off politically-sensitive austerity measures, and also resulted in the first post-2011 rise in Egypt's sovereign credit rating, Gulf financial assistance lacked the conditionality associated with IMF support, and was granted without regard for monitoring or implementation procedures, effectively doing away with any notion of tying disbursement to minimal standards of good governance.⁵⁰

The politics of Gulf support: the Qatari example

» The political purpose of Gulf financial support to Egypt and other transition states becomes apparent when considered as part of an interlocking approach to regional issues. Lines were blurred as resources were mobilised to support political initiatives across the spectrum of diplomacy, mediation, investment, and development. This occurred as GCC states developed both the capability and the willingness to deploy ever-larger amounts

48. 'Qatar Hails New Egypt Leader in Apparent Policy Shift', *Reuters*, 4 July 2013.

49. 'UAE Signs \$4.9 Billion Aid Package to Egypt', *Reuters*, 26 October 2013.

50. 'Egypt to Use Gulf Billions to Spur Economy', *Reuters*, 21 August 2013.

of developmental assistance to underpin their greater activism in regional and foreign policy. The intersection of Qatari investments with diplomatic mediation initiatives prior to 2011 and in North Africa after the Arab spring constitutes the highest-profile instance of the political context that frames Gulf engagement with the MENA transitions, although the unfolding Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Emirati assistance to post-coup Egypt must also be seen in the same light.

Qatari mediation in conflict-affected areas of Yemen, Lebanon, and Darfur between 2007 and 2010 helped propel the country onto the international stage, but in each instance, Qatar's diplomacy was accompanied by what Anders Gulbrandsen has labelled 'business diplomacy'. This frequently took the form of targeted investments by the Qatar Investment Authority (controlled until 2013 by the charismatic prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani – HBJ) and its derivative subsidiaries such as Qatari Diar, and active involvement by banks, such as the Qatar Islamic Bank.⁵¹ Notable examples of such state capitalist investment were a US\$400 million hotel and residential project being developed by Qatari Diar in Sudan's capital Khartoum,⁵² Qatar Islamic Bank's joint venture in Lebanon with Beirut-based Arab Finance House,⁵³ and, in Yemen, an ultimately unsuccessful collaboration between Qatari Diar and the local Shibam Holding to develop the Al-Rayyan Hills project. This planned US\$600 million mixed-use development would have been the largest residential construction in Sana'a had it gone ahead, but work was suspended in March 2011 due to the intensifying political crisis in Yemen.⁵⁴

The aforementioned investments took place as an adjunct to Qatari diplomatic mediation efforts. After the outbreak of the regional upheaval in North Africa, similar Qatari largesse has poured into the transition states as they emerged from the Arab spring. Commercial relations between Qatar and Tunisia boomed following the January 2011 revolution and subsequent election of an Ennahda (Islamist)-led government. Especially noteworthy was an announcement in May 2012 that Qatar plans to construct a 120,000 barrels/day refinery on Tunisia's Gulf of Gabes' coast at La Skhira. This US\$2 billion project would allow Tunisia to refine oil from neighbouring Libya and develop Tunisia's potential as an export hub for refined products, massively expanding capacity beyond the aging 35,000 barrels/day Bizerte refinery. The announcement formed part of a wider Qatari effort to kick-start Tunisia's ailing economy following the dislocation caused by the anti-Ben Ali revolt. Others made in 2012 included balance of payments support to Tunisia's Central Bank to overcome a deteriorating external balance problem, and Qatar Petroleum International's support for vocational training in Tunisia's hydrocarbons sector.⁵⁵

Qatari investment in Libya surged after the demise of Gaddafi and his replacement by the Qatari-backed National Transitional Council.⁵⁶ Financial ties emerged in April 2012, with the purchase of a 49 per cent stake in Libya's Bank of Commerce and Development by the Qatar National Bank (QNB) Group. QNB is 50 per cent owned by the Qatar Investment



51. Gulbrandsen, op. cit., p.40.

52. Ibid., p.64.

53. Ibid., p.51.

54. 'Economic Highlights of the New Cabinet's Two-Year Plan (Part 3)', *Yemen Times*, 19 January 2012.

55. 'Qatar Refinery Play Highlights Tunisian Agenda', *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(924), 24 May 2012, p.8.

56. 'Qatar, Tunisia Sign Investment Accords', *Gulf Times*, 14 January 2012.

Authority which, as mentioned above, answered to HBJ in his capacity as vice-chairman and CEO at the time of the revolution in Libya.⁵⁷

Most remarkably, on a visit to Cairo in early September 2012, HBJ publicly announced that Qatar would invest a staggering US\$18 billion in Egypt over five years. Commenting that there would be ‘no limits’ to Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood-ruled country struggling to find conventional funds to balance Egypt’s budget, HBJ stated that US\$8 billion would be invested in an integrated power plant, natural gas, and iron steel project in Port Said, while the remaining US\$10 billion would finance the construction of a tourism marina complex on the Mediterranean coastline. However, the announcement was noticeably lacking in details of how the funds would be disbursed, and, similar to previous headline-grabbing suggestions of aid in May 2011, ultimately never materialised.⁵⁸ Shortly afterward, the commercial links between Egypt and Qatar thickened with an announced partnership between private equity firm Nile Capital and one of HBJ’s sons, Jabir, to create a US\$250 million fund to invest in education across the Middle East and North Africa.⁵⁹

From the foregoing, it is readily apparent that significant amounts of Gulf capital are being made available to MENA states, whether via ‘official’ aid packages or through varied investment channels. This raises important questions regarding the implications for transparency and public accountability, within both sending and recipient states. All the sovereign wealth funds based in GCC states score poorly on the transparency index constructed by the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute and only two of the smaller funds – Mubadala and Bahrain’s Mumtalakat – publish annual audited balance sheets. Saudi Arabia (and Oman) are not members of the IMF-initiated International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds, while in Kuwait it is illegal to disclose publicly any data on the assets of the Kuwait Investment Authority, which presents instead an annual report of its accounts to a closed session of the National Assembly. Further challenges to accountability arise out of the opaque nature of the relationship between sovereign wealth funds and Gulf ruling families acting through private investment vehicles.⁶⁰

The personalisation and predominantly *ad hoc* nature of much GCC decision-making is another hurdle to embedding concepts of transparency and accountability (to say nothing of good governance) within institutional frameworks. In 2008, for example, Qatari mediators pledged between US\$300 million and US\$500 million in reconstruction for the war-torn Yemeni province of Sa’ada, where anti-government rebels had been battling the central government since 2004. However, when the Qatari mediation efforts failed in 2009 and fighting resumed, assistance pledges were abruptly withdrawn, contributing to a new source of tension between the local community and the government as the former wrongly attributed to the latter the absence of the hoped-for development projects.⁶¹ As noted above, a similar non-materialisation later befell the grandiose promise of US\$18 billion in investments in Egypt announced by HBJ in 2012, as Qatar’s lustre faded together with the fortunes of the Muslim Brotherhood.

57. ‘QNB Buys Almost Half of Major Libyan Bank’, *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(922), 26 April 2012, p.13.

58. ‘Qatar Seeks to Invest – and Secure its Footing – in the New Egypt’, *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(932), 27 September 2012, pp.9-10.

59. ‘Egyptian Private Equity Firm Teams Up with HBJ Son’, *Gulf States Newsletter* 36(934), 25 October 2012, p.13.

60. ‘Sovereign Wealth Funds: Back on Form’, *The Gulf* 99(4), May 2011, pp.20-1.

61. S. Barakat, ‘The Qatari Spring: Qatar’s Emerging Role in Peacemaking’, *LSE Kuwait Program Working Paper* 10, 2010, p.16.

Implications for governance reform and Western assistance

>> The post-Arab spring regional landscape has not been favourable to Western organisations that have long engaged with MENA states in support of reform agendas. The gloomy prospect facing advocates of human rights and domestic reforms in transition states is of great significance for international NGOs and humanitarian actors. From Libya and Egypt to the Gulf, civil society representatives and human rights activists have faced campaigns of harassment and imprisonment by governments that are quick to suspect the shadowy outline of a foreign hand in fomenting domestic unrest. Furthermore, the enactment of new laws across the region have reduced the levels of permissible activity and placed in question the ability of genuinely autonomous civil society groups and humanitarian actors to operate beyond a set of very tightly bound and strictly non-political parameters. The rising visibility and importance of Gulf aid and development means that these trends are likely to continue in the short term, as it comes with fewer conditions and is packaged in a more palatable manner than Western-based institutional support.

An early indication of the potentially mutually incompatible approaches to issues of human rights came in June 2011 when the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued arrest warrants for ousted Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, his son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, and his brother-in-law and intelligence chief, Abdullah Senussi. Following the death of Muammar Gaddafi at the hands of his captors in October 2011 and the subsequent capture of Saif al-Islam the following month, an unseemly dispute arose between the ICC and Libya's transitional government, over whether Saif should stand trial in Libya or at The Hague. Instead of handing Saif al-Islam over as per the execution of the arrest warrant, he was held in secret detention by the militia that captured him, without access to a lawyer, and in violation of Libya's legal obligation to surrender him to the ICC. Moreover, when a four-member legal delegation from the ICC was able to meet with Saif, they were themselves arrested and detained briefly on allegations that they had been passing documents 'that represent a danger to the security of Libya'.⁶²

Later in 2011, a wave of arrests of NGO staffers working in Egypt brought further evidence of the challenging operating environment facing international partners. The armed raids by Egyptian security forces targeted high-profile human rights and pro-democracy organisations, including the US government funded National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, as well as the international NGO Freedom House.⁶³ The raids and arrests of NGO workers were justified on the grounds

62. 'ICC Legal Team Held over Saif al-Islam Visit', *Al-Jazeera Online*, 10 June 2012.

63. 'US "Deeply Concerned" After Egyptian Forces Raid NGO Offices in Cairo', *The Guardian*, 29 December 2011.

that the Egyptian government was investigating the foreign funding of civil society organisations. In June 2013, a criminal court in Cairo convicted 43 NGO workers, including 16 Americans tried in absentia, of operating without a license and receiving foreign funding.⁶⁴

It was not merely in transition states that advocates of domestic reform and human rights faced increasing obstacles. In the UAE, the arrest of 94 members of a suspected Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organisation charged with endangering national security in 2012 was accompanied by a widespread closure of international NGO branches operating in the Emirates. In rapid succession, the spring of 2012 saw the abrupt departure of the regional branches of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Gallup International (in Abu Dhabi) and the National Democratic Institute (in Dubai), with the Abu Dhabi office of RAND also being closed later in the year. All four institutions had actively been courted by Emirati officials as part of their internationalisation strategy in the late 2000s, making their sudden closure, on the grounds that they had no legal permit to operate in the country, all the more unexpected. In addition to the physical expulsion of international NGOs, in November 2012, the UAE amended its 2006 Cyber Crimes law. The new decree (Federal Legal Decree No. 5 for 2012) issued by President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, included a sweeping declaration stipulating ‘penalties of imprisonment’ for any act intended to ‘damage the reputation or the stature of the state or any of its institutions, its President, the Vice President, any of the Rulers of the emirates, their Crown Princes, the Deputy Rulers, the national flag, the national anthem, the emblem of the state or any of its symbols’.⁶⁵ The decree was so wide in its scope, and so vague in its potential interpretation, that even the normally pro-government English-language newspaper *The National* ran an editorial requesting clarification ‘on what types of speech or actions would be considered damaging’.⁶⁶

It is against this backdrop of intensifying suspicion of the motives and objectives of international NGOs that the greater flow of regional funds to MENA states must be assessed. Given that the UAE, along with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, has emerged as one of the most active regional donors in recent years, it is evident that the lowering threshold of permissible activism may not merely be confined to the domestic arena alone. As the more ‘pragmatic’ nature of Gulf States’ financial assistance and development financing stands in contrast to the association of Western sources of funding with goals oriented or tied to governance reform or other conditions, embattled governments across the region may choose the former over the latter as it comes with fewer ‘strings attached’.

64. ‘Egypt Convicts US NGO Workers’, *The Guardian*, 4 June 2013.

65. ‘Full text of UAE decree on combating cyber crimes’, *Gulfnews.com*, 12 November 2012.

66. ‘Far-reaching cyber law a legal necessity’, *The National*, 14 November 2012.

Conclusion

»» This working paper has documented how the Gulf States have acquired and projected increasing influence on the regional and global stage. The decade of rapidly-rising oil prices that preceded the start of the Arab spring in December 2010 enabled Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to become far more visible participants in economic globalisation. Moreover, the state of flux in the global economy following the 2007-8 financial crisis opened up new opportunities for the Gulf States to engage proactively in moves to raise the representation of emerging economies in frameworks of global governance. The role of Gulf sovereign wealth funds in recapitalising struggling Western financial institutions and the UAE and Qatar's involvement in new structures of energy governance provide two tangible examples of this increased participation in the governance of globalisation. These occurred against the backdrop of deep changes to the geopolitical context as deepening interdependencies bound the Gulf States closer to Asian partners as part of a rebalancing of geo-economic power even as cracks appeared in the political (if not security) relationship with the US.

Having charted the macro-level drivers behind their global emergence, the second half of this paper examined Gulf States' responses to the Arab spring upheaval in MENA states. Gulf aid and assistance provided the new political elites in North Africa with alternative sources of financial support that were not tied to governance performance or political reform. Qatar and Saudi Arabia also played leading roles in mobilising and arming the Syrian opposition to Bashar al-Assad, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE intervened in Bahrain to prevent the upheaval from enveloping a fellow ruling family. However, the continuing conflict in Syria and the burgeoning rapprochement between Iran and the international community have highlighted the geopolitical challenges that can and will arise when regional and international objectives diverge. In both cases, Gulf leaders now must decide whether and how to engage in multilateral diplomatic processes to obtain a collective settlement acceptable to all participants.

The rise of the Gulf States as regional powers with international reach poses new challenges for policy-making in the Middle East and North Africa as the region emerges unsteadily from the Arab spring. Chief among them is the growing evidence that Gulf officials are prepared to 'go it alone' and act unilaterally or, at best, as a loose regional bloc to secure their interests in transition states. Such actions raise questions for the broader international community of how to align Gulf States' support in the short term with moves toward sustainable development and political inclusiveness in the longer run. Yet, the examples of Egypt and Syria suggest that Gulf power players are less inclined to listen to what they perceive as increasingly discredited Western-centric approaches that have, in their view, exacerbated instability in MENA transition states since 2011.

A way forward for national, regional, and international actors is to better recognise the gap between the nature of the problems identified above and the tentative ways in which they could be tackled. Identifying where sources of difference lie and

pinpointing areas of potential cooperation will enhance policy-makers' understanding of the practical measures that can bridge sometimes-competing interests and create overlapping partnerships across the region. Engaging constructively with Gulf actors will require the investment of considerable time and effort to communicate better with partner organisations that may share different objectives or normative concepts.

In the fraught regional environment of the Middle East and North Africa after the cathartic experience of the Arab spring, such challenges are made more daunting by the suspicion directed by regional officials at Western-based NGOs and civil society organisations. Yet, while the task of finding common ground and operating procedures may be challenging, it is critical if Western organisations are to retain influence and relevance in MENA. International actors will need to absorb and accommodate the views of Gulf countries, and find new ways to develop deeper partnerships based on an agreed set of values.

Western and Gulf actors will therefore need to enhance their familiarity with each other's values and identify options for working with partners that do not necessarily share the same norms. One way of exploring how to move forward together is to organise a series of high-level policy panels or expert workshops to gather views on how best to approach the challenges of transition in MENA states or societies. Such meetings could encompass practitioners from the governmental and non-governmental sectors, religious and civil society organisations, business, and academia, in order to discuss opportunities and challenges in particular contexts.

Cooperative frameworks or initiatives such as the Friends of Yemen working groups, one of which has been chaired by the UAE since 2010, or Qatar's aforementioned role in leading the Global Redesign Initiative's supplementary hearings on energy security governance, offer themselves as relatively successful instances whereby a diverse range of actors have pooled resources rather than worked unilaterally. In both cases, engagement has taken place around a specific issue. Establishing a working rapport on manageable and 'quick impact' projects can generate the confidence-building measures necessary to scale up cooperation in support of the much larger and more complex targeted interventions that will be needed to stabilise the Middle East and North Africa in the months and years to come.

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