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CHANGE AND CONTINUITY
IN THE GULF

Report

by **Carlos COSTA NEVES** (Portugal)
Rapporteur

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I. INTRODUCTION: A TROUBLED REGION OF CENTRAL IMPORTANCE

1. For a region which from the outside sometimes seems characterised by shared cultural and religious traditions, the Gulf has long been fraught with division and tensions. Given its central strategic importance as a global supplier of energy, its status as the centre of the Islamic world, its growing importance as a shipping and financial hub and its proximity to several highly unstable and war-torn countries including Yemen, these divisions are consequential for the Euro-Atlantic community and thus merit serious and sustained attention.

2. Tensions in the Middle East, and even among the Gulf monarchies themselves, have recently returned to the headlines. Political, social, economic and cultural change is buffeting the Gulf monarchies which greatly prize stability, in no small measure because enduring stability has proven so elusive. The Gulf has long been an object of struggle between great powers and a centre of sectarian tension. It has been threatened by war and foreign invasion and has also been an incubator for and a victim of terrorist movements.

3. Several of the Gulf countries have also become significantly more assertive on the regional and global stages. This is a function of their wealth, but it also reflects a degree of ambition and an evolving perception of risks and opportunities related to changes in the international system itself. Saudi Arabia is the most powerful of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. It aspires to play the role of hegemon in the region and to be the indispensable leader of the broader Middle East. However, it is not alone in these ambitions. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) also has leadership aspirations, although it is structurally more divided and significantly smaller than its Saudi neighbour. It often aligns closely with Saudi Arabia but has not hesitated to challenge it on a number of matters. By contrast, the tiny country of Bahrain is highly dependent on Saudi Arabia and this shapes much of its external policy. Qatar, on the other hand, has consciously differentiated itself from Saudi Arabia. For example, it supported the Arab uprisings of 2008 while opposing the Saudi/UAE intervention in Yemen. It is now isolated for this reason but continues to advance an independent approach to a range of regional security issues. It sponsors the highly influential Al Jazeera media network, which has 80 offices globally and which is often identified as a kind of opposition new source throughout the region. Like Kuwait, Qatar also aspires to play a role of mediator and has willingly fostered dialogue with a number of political dissenters in the region, many of whom are not welcome in their home countries.

4. The Gulf region as a whole is now able to play a stronger international role, in part because some of the traditional regional powers—Egypt, Syria, and Iraq—have been consumed by domestic political strife, terrorism and, in the case of the latter two, civil war. Finally, the perception that the United States takes less interest in the Gulf has injected this activism with a greater sense of purpose (Wahba, 2017).

5. The Gulf region is also one of the wealthiest regions in the world because of its oil and gas endowments. Yet, its own capacity to shape global energy markets through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has diminished with the rise of non-OPEC production. The changing dynamics of global energy markets are only accelerating as developed countries increasingly turn to renewable energies, which are increasingly cost-competitive with carbon-based energy. At the same time, the United States is leading a hydraulic fracturing revolution which has dramatically increased its oil and gas production. OPEC thus no longer wields the kind of leverage it once did. New competitors have helped drive prices down in recent years, although the announcement of US sanctions on Iran is currently helping to tighten up oil markets with prices approaching USD 80 a barrel in late May 2018 (Slav, 2018). Oil inventories have also begun to fall although surging US production could push down prices again.

6. Of all the challenges that the Gulf region confronts, this shift in global energy market dynamics that may well prove the most compelling. To varying degrees, a new generation of leaders, notably in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, has begun to appreciate that planning for life after the oil boon is now essential, even if the day when that energy is exhausted is decades away. Years of overreliance on

energy exports have left these economies vulnerable to shifts in global demand and prices. Overreliance, in turn, has bred a kind of economic and social complacency that the countries of the region now recognise as a problem. The Gulf countries are confronted with unprecedented economic pressures and need to curtail government spending to better insulate themselves from the vagaries of oscillating oil and gas prices. But there are risks that doing so will undermine an old practice of using government outlays to purchase a modicum of social consensus and even political legitimacy. On the other hand, those practices seem fiscally unsustainable. In the UAE, for example, government spending has been cut by slashing fuel subsidies. Taxes have also been raised to put state budgets on a more sustainable footing. The UAE and Saudi Arabia simultaneously introduced a value-added tax in January 2018 to broaden both states' revenue bases beyond energy markets (CIA World Factbook, 2017). This is an important change that reflects longer-term strategies for coping with important economic challenges.

7. Achieving a greater degree of economic diversification has thus become something of a leitmotiv throughout the Gulf region. But moving from energy dependent economies to broadly diversified ones is not an easy process. While centralised and closed political systems, in which the lives of citizens are highly constrained, are certainly capable of administering oil exporting enclaves, they are not particularly well-suited for managing diversified 21st century service- and innovation-based economies. Transitioning from one kind of economic system to another invariably implies fundamental political and social change. This has placed these countries in something of a bind. They recognise the need for reform and have, to varying extents, embraced the idea. But leaders worry about both their own grip on power and the fragile nature of the societies over which they preside. They fear that broad economic change might ignite regional, social, sectarian, class and ethnic tensions. They also worry about the security order of the region as a whole, including the Iranian challenge and the terrorist threat.

8. The Gulf is a geostrategically fragmented region and lacks the unity to establish a genuine alliance among the states of the peninsula. The countries of the Gulf established the GCC in 1981, several months after the Iranian revolution, to foster closer economic and security relations on the Arabian Peninsula and to build a counterweight to the revolutionary government in Tehran. The membership consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A summit is held each year to discuss the state of economic cooperation and regional affairs. The Council has never assumed the form of a genuine alliance. It is essentially a talk shop, in which the governments and states of the region can share national concerns and perspectives on a range of issues. Efforts to deepen ties, such as the establishment of a monetary council aiming to create a single currency, have not developed as originally hoped. The GCC has however adopted an Internal Security pact calling for closer coordination of internal security and surveillance policies as well as information sharing. It has also established a standing force to deter and respond to military aggression against any of the GCC members. This force was in its infancy during the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990-1991, although elements participated in Kuwait's liberation in 1991. These forces were also used to support the government of Bahrain during uprisings in 2011, although Oman and Kuwait refrained from participating in that controversial operation. The GCC has thus shown itself to be more of a centre for consultation and coordination than a formal alliance. US President Donald Trump's recent call for the formation of a NATO-like alliance of Gulf states thus represented more of an aspiration than a likelihood (Rogin, 2017). The underlying conditions for the formation of such a regional alliance do not currently exist, as the ongoing crisis over Qatar so clearly illustrates.

II. GENERATIONAL CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP AND CHANGING DOMESTIC POLITICS IN THE GULF

9. One element of dynamism in the Gulf today has been the emergence of energetic and young leaders in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Although Saudi Arabia is far more conservative socially and politically than the UAE, a new generation of leaders has seemed to pushing for a degree of modernisation within the limits of that country's political, social and religious reality. Saudi Arabia's

dynamic Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the designated heir to the throne as well as the Minister of Defence, has embarked on a series of limited reforms that could have an impact on a range of matters related to the economy, tourism and women's rights. These reforms, however, have also been coupled with acts of repression. To this day, dissent in this country is met with repression and can lead to long-term incarceration or worse (Human Rights Watch, Saudi Arabia).

10. Worried about the prospect of an American retreat from the region, Mr bin Salman has also pushed for a more active foreign and defence policy. He is the primary architect of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen. To galvanise the region's economy, the Crown Prince is also seeking to create a new economic zone reaching from Saudi Arabia into Egypt and Jordan. How far he will be able to push this reform agenda is not clear. Resistance is likely on many fronts, including from the conservative clerical establishment as well as from those Saudis who have come to depend on the largess of the state treasury. It is telling that civil servant anger recently compelled the government to back away from plans to reduce benefits. Putting the state budget on a more sustainable basis, restructuring the economy, according women greater freedoms and reducing the clout of powerful ultra-conservative Wahhabi clerics may prove highly challenging in a society in which traditional elements have long resisted change and modernisation.

11. While not the formal ruler of the country, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan of the UAE has also helped put his country on the road to more rapid modernisation, social reform, economic and energy diversification, and regional ambition. He is the third son of Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the first President of the UAE, and current ruler of Abu Dhabi. He is a graduate of the Royal Sandhurst Military College in the United Kingdom and is now Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. UAE leaders sense that they are well positioned to share the reform experience with their Saudi interlocutors and that this could be an important moment for both countries. Although it is not a democracy, the UAE has constructed a significantly more open, cosmopolitan, and pluralistic society than that of Saudi Arabia. Its economy has been more successfully diversified in recent decades.

12. The UAE seems very focused on preparing its society for the coming century. For example, it has created a Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and another for Happiness. It has made major investments in technologies that will drive the so-called fourth industrial revolution and has sought to raise education standards to high levels for both men and women to lay the foundations for a knowledge rather than an energy-driven economy. Carbon-based energy revenues currently constitute 30% of GNP, and the goal is to drive this downward over time by expanding the economy in other directions. The UAE is also pushing hard for renewable energy solutions to meet national and indeed international demand. Solar power technologies have advanced rapidly and producing solar generated electricity in the region has become cheaper than using coal for this purpose. The UAE is moving quickly to build up its capacity in this promising new industry and is funding important research in new sources of renewable energy and energy efficiencies. Not coincidentally, it hosts the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Masdar City, which has been designed as a modern urban space run on renewable energy. Despite these positive developments, the UAE is not democratic, and critics can be summarily arrested and jailed. Like several of its neighbours, the UAE has a poor record in according domestic workers basic rights (Human Rights Watch, UAE).

13. For a society that deeply values its traditions, some positive changes are nevertheless underway in the UAE and this has had important consequences for women who have assumed an important role in political, economic and academic life in recent decades. Currently, the Speaker of the Federal National Council and eight government ministers are female. There is an openly expressed recognition that the UAE cannot prosper without the economic advancement of women, although the leadership is also very mindful of its cultural and religious traditions (NATO PA, Visit to Abu Dhabi). There is also a immense disparity in how female citizens and female guest workers are treated.

14. Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani became the 8th Emir of Qatar in June 2013 and is the youngest reigning monarch in the Gulf region. He too has sought to modernise the state, the national economy and society through bureaucratic reform. He has launched a programme to fully transform the country's infrastructure through a massive investment programme largely funded with energy revenues. He has made economic diversification a top priority. In foreign policy, however, his positions have been unpopular with Qatar's Gulf neighbours, including his support for rebels in the Syrian civil war, the Muslim Brotherhood and the previous Egyptian government of Mohamed Morsi—a position which has earned Qatar the enduring enmity of the current Egyptian government. Qatar's close links with the Muslim Brotherhood, its ties to some Islamist groups operating in the Middle East and its underwriting of Al Jazeera have all fomented tension with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE as well as with Egypt. Under Sheikh al-Thani, Qatar has nevertheless cultivated strong ties with Turkey, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 2014 al-Thani renewed an important bilateral defence agreement with the United States that allows it to host the Combined Air Operations Center at the Al Udeid Air Base. A number of Allied representatives are working at that important facility ([NATO PA, March 2018](#)).

15. Although there have been improvements in the country's human rights protections, Qatar, like its neighbours, is not a democracy in the manner that Western countries tend to define the term. It does, however, seem to embrace the notion of greater pluralism and has made some progress in recognising the important role played by non-citizens in the country's economic development. Perhaps as a result of greater international scrutiny linked to its hosting the World Cup, the cabinet passed a domestic workers law granting labour protections to Qatar's significant population of domestic workers. The law, however, fails to conform fully to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention. Qatar also signed a technical cooperation agreement with ILO in which it has promised to better protect migrant workers. According to Human Rights Watch, Qatar's personal status and nationality laws continue to discriminate against women (Human Rights Watch, Qatar).

16. Bahrain is led by Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa who had previously served as Defence Minister from 1971 to 1988. Of all the GCC countries, Bahrain was the most affected by the Arab uprisings in 2011. Tensions ran high in that small country, where a Sunni ruling elite governs a Shia majority country. This situation has always been a source of insecurity. Widespread Shia dominated opposition protests in 2011 were interpreted as an existential threat in government circles and in neighbouring Saudi Arabia, which also has a significant Shia minority. There were thus strong pressures on Sheikh al-Khalifah to crack down and he did so with the support of 1,000 Saudi and 500 UAE troops who entered the country on 14 March 2011 to help suppress street demonstrations. Sheikh al-Khalifah then declared a national emergency and three months of martial law. Thus, for Bahrain, the Arab Spring had led to conflict, an estimated 164 deaths, and more than 2,000 incarcerations. This, in turn, reinforced Saudi and UAE concerns about the so-called Arab Spring and vindicated their deep suspicions of this vast movement that had so quickly spread throughout the broader Middle East.

17. Not surprisingly, this tense domestic political situation has led to a degradation of the human rights climate in Bahrain. The right of assembly has since been eviscerated and summary arrests of dissidents and even their families have been common. Hundreds have lost their citizenship and have been deported for expressing unwelcome political views including political activists, journalists and lawyers (Human Right Watch, Bahrain).

18. Kuwait has been ruled by the al-Sabah dynasty since the 18th century, although Great Britain controlled its foreign and security policy from 1899 until 1961. Kuwait's recent foreign and security policy has been strongly conditioned by its experience in the first Gulf War when Iraq attacked and occupied the country in 1990. A US led military coalition later liberated Kuwait, which had suffered extensive damages, including the destruction of the country's vital oil production infrastructure. The al-Sabah family returned to power in 1991 and reconstituted the parliament. Kuwait also suffered a degree of instability during the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings with stateless Bidoon and Bedouin groups

protesting for citizenship and fairer economic treatment. This led the Prime Minister to change the electoral law that discriminated against Bedouins. Since 2006 when he came to power, the Emir Sabah IV Amad al-Jaber al Sabah has dissolved the National Assembly seven times which reflects a degree of internal instability.

19. Like the other Gulf countries, Kuwait does not broker political dissent and there are limits on free speech and political activism, as one would expect in a society that is not organised in a democratic fashion. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable and there are many cases of abuse, forced labour and summary deportation. There are also an estimated 100,000 stateless Bedouin residing in the country and there has been little progress towards addressing their demands for citizenship. This community suffered significant discrimination particularly after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (Human Rights Watch, Kuwait).

III. THE GULF, IRAN, AND TENSIONS WITHIN THE GCC

20. To varying degrees, the Gulf monarchies, with the partial exception of Qatar, have identified Iran as their greatest rival. These governments believe that Iran actively seeks to export its revolution while compulsively interfering in the internal matters of neighbouring states. They see Iran as intent on developing nuclear weapons and accuse it of using proxies to advance its sectarian and strategic ambitions at the direct expense of the GCC. They feel encircled by Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. They are thus promoting an alternative strategic vision for the region and have deployed money, arms, and in some cases, military forces to manage the Iranian threat. The preoccupation of the Gulf states - and particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE - with Iran has also conditioned their outlook on the broader region. Their outlook is informed by a kind of domino theory in which local conflicts are seen largely in terms of whether outcomes might somehow accord Iran even a modicum of strategic advantage. The Saudis see themselves as leading the effort to contain Iran and this heavily conditions their approach to the broader Middle East and even to North Africa.

21. The Iran question has thus become something of a litmus test for the region and has revealed both the underlying tensions among the Gulf monarchies and their shared interests. These cross-cutting fissures are emblematic of both the region's complexity and the nature of the monarchical regimes that dominate politics on the peninsula.

22. That said, the region's policy toward Iran is hardly unified. Qatar's significantly less hard-line approach, for example, is partly conditioned by its stake in a huge gas field it shares with Iran. It accordingly feels that it must manage those relations carefully to ensure access to that vital source of national wealth.

23. Qatar also confronts few internal ethno-social tensions and has felt that it can move with ease and confidence across the region's defining fault lines. Unlike Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, for example, it does not have a significant Shia community. This confidence is perhaps encapsulated in its sponsorship of the Al Jazeera media empire as well as its support for several movements in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Gaza and Yemen. All of this has led to serious strains with Qatar's Gulf neighbours and inspired several Saudi efforts to bring Qatar to heel, most recently through a comprehensive embargo. If anything, however, that embargo has compelled Qatar to deepen ties with Iran simply as a matter of economic survival.

24. These tensions have had implications that go beyond the Gulf. Both the United States and its European allies do not welcome division in the Gulf as it adds another layer of complexity to an already difficult strategic landscape. It also leads to new balancing games that can have unanticipated spill over effects. Qatar has now aligned itself more closely with Turkey, which itself has sought to play a more active role in the region and make its own contributions to stability there. In fact, the Turkish government established a military base in Qatar in 2014 which is aimed at training Qatari forces. The United States also has its largest military base in the Middle East in Qatar. In a sense, the presence

of these key players helps keep a lid on regional tensions, but a country like the United States does not want to get caught up in rivalries among its Gulf partners.

25. Kuwait is geographically closer to Iran than its GCC partners, and one third of its population is Shia. For both these reasons it also manages its relations with Iran cautiously and it has actively sought to mediate tensions within the GCC. It hosted the 38th GCC Summit in Kuwait City in December 2017 which ended a day earlier than anticipated due to these tensions. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah had openly expressed his hope that the summit would lay the groundwork for reconciliation with Qatar although this was not on the official agenda.

26. Kuwait thus has a complex relationship with Iran. Iran fought a long war against Iraq's Saddam Hussein who would later occupy Kuwait during the so-called First Gulf War. This gives Kuwait and Iran something of a shared point of reference. Interestingly, Kuwait's Shia community played a leading role in the resistance when Saddam Hussein occupied the country. But there were also incidents of Shia terrorism in Kuwait during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Iran's support for a Shia missionary movement in Kuwait after the revolution generated some tension. But when Iraq occupied Kuwait in 1990-1991, the local Shia community played a key role in the resistance and this contributed to their deeper integration in Kuwaiti society. Since then, Kuwait has sought to assimilate its Shia community into the country's political and economic structures. This has built a kind of social solidarity in Kuwaiti society that has lowered potential sectarian tensions while allowing the government to approach Iran with a degree of confidence, although this has not always turned out well. Kuwait did not cut relations with Iran in 2016 after Iran executed Nimr bagir al-Nimr, a Saudi cleric, and targeted Saudi diplomatic sites in Iran. Kuwait has also used its special position to play a mediation role in Yemen. In 2017, Emir Sabah IV al-Ahmad al-Sabah reached out to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to begin a strategic dialogue aiming to lower tensions in the region. In January 2017, Kuwait's foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah travelled to Iran with a letter from the Emir inviting the government to create the foundations for a dialogue with the GCC. Iran's foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zariff responded positively. But in the end, little came of this as Riyadh did not support the effort. In July 2017, Kuwait expelled 15 Iranian diplomats and wrote a formal letter of protest to Lebanon when it was learned that a terror cell seeking to stockpile weaponry in Kuwait was receiving training from Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard (Ulrichsen, 2017).

27. The UAE has a very different outlook on Iran. It claims that Iran occupies three of its islands - Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb. This obviously constitutes a serious impediment to relations with that country. Iran, in turn, has protested the presence of French military forces in the UAE and close cooperation with other Western militaries. The UAE has joined Saudi Arabia on the battlefields of Yemen and has characterised the war there, in part, as a struggle to impede Iran's gambit for regional hegemony. There is a significant presence of Iranians in Dubai, and it has long cultivated economic relations with Iran. There are roughly 8,000 Iranian traders and firms registered in the UAE and this makes the relationship very complex.

28. Bahrain is a small island state linked to Saudi Arabia by a narrow causeway. It is very dependent on its large neighbour, but it must also deal with the obvious paradox that it is a Shia majority country ruled by a Sunni royal family. This is a source of insecurity in the country and it has generally aligned itself very closely with Saudi Arabia on matters pertaining to Iran. In the past, Bahrain has challenged Qatar's sovereign control of the Hawar Islands and the town of Zubara. The current crisis with Qatar has reopened this old dispute.

29. Oman lies just across the Strait of Hormuz from Iran. It maintains a policy of strict neutrality and thus seeks to cultivate peaceful relations with all of its neighbours including Iran. Like Kuwait, it often finds itself playing the role of diplomatic go-between for Iran and Saudi Arabia (Goujon, 2017).

30. For its part, Iran harbours a strategic ambition to play a defining role in the Islamic and Arab worlds through its relations with Shia and some radical Sunni groups. It has also established a

powerful military presence throughout the region. This has undoubtedly shaped the geostrategic landscape of the broader Middle East to its advantage. It sees both Saudi Arabia and the United States as the leading impediments to its ambitions and this obviously shapes myriad elements of its foreign and defence policy. The United States and Saudi Arabia, in turn, understand Iran as the primary threat to regional security. Not surprisingly, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE were all very critical of the outcome of the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany) nuclear negotiations with Iran which resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Accordingly, they were delighted that Mr Trump picked up on arguments that they had used to denounce that arrangement and have generally supported the Trump Administration's recent decision to walk away from the JCPOA and reinstitute sanctions.

31. But views in the region have been nuanced. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have taken the hardest line on Iran. Saudi leaders continue to see Tehran as a direct challenge to their country's ambitions to act as the region's power broker. Saudi and UAE officials felt that the agreement had done nothing to alter Iranian behaviour, at least in terms of its aggressive regional policy. From their perspective, Iran's leadership remains inordinately aggressive and ambitious, continues to develop ballistic missile technologies that could someday be used to deploy nuclear weapons, and indeed harbours nuclear ambitions despite the commitments it made in signing the JCPOA.

32. In the wake of the US decision, the Saudis have said that they are prepared to work with the United States and the international community to address Iran's nuclear programme as well as its ballistic missile programme and support for militant groups in the region. Last March, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman said that his country would "without a doubt" develop nuclear weapons if Iran did so (Reuters, 2018). Oman and the Emirate of Dubai, by contrast, saw in the nuclear deal an opportunity to revive mutually beneficial trade with Iran. Qatar and Kuwait, on the other hand, worried about Iranian military power but had nevertheless long advocated a reduction in tensions with Tehran.

33. Most of the region's governments also remain highly mindful of continued Iranian efforts to interfere in the domestic affairs of Gulf states including through weapons smuggling and the country's continued support for proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, Shia militia in Iraq and Houthi rebels in Yemen. They cite continued Iranian intervention in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon as matters of serious concern. This apprehension is a key foreign policy driver, particularly for Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In November 2017, for example, Saudi Arabia placed enormous pressure on Saad Hariri, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, to resign because of Hezbollah's ongoing presence in Lebanon's governing coalition. Under circumstances that remain something of a mystery, Hariri read out a letter of resignation in Riyadh, although he later rescinded that resignation. But the response in Lebanon was one of collective resentment at Saudi interference. At the same time, the League of Arab States met in an emergency session and agreed to declare Hezbollah a terrorist organisation. This paradoxically aligned the Arab League's position with that of Israel (Gardner, 2017) and not surprisingly there have been reports of high-level contacts between Gulf officials and the Israeli government on matters of shared interest (Zakheim, 2017).

34. There has been a reluctance to cast the Gulf rivalry with Iran in overtly sectarian terms although sectarianism is often at play and used subtly as a mobilising device. The Gulf states tend to claim that their problem is with the Iranian regime and not with the Iranian people. Gulf analysts suggest that recent anti-government demonstrations in nearly 60 Iranian cities point to serious domestic dissatisfaction with the regime, driven by a lack of civil rights and a poor economic situation. Those demonstrations, however, were essentially a leaderless phenomenon which Iranian security forces were able to quell quickly through intensified security measures.

35. In contrast to the Obama Administration, President Trump has chosen not to make distinctions between reformist groups close to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and more hard-line factions aligned with the most conservative and anti-Western mullahs. This puts the Trump Administration at odds with many European governments which believe these distinctions are important. President

Obama's approach reverberated negatively in the Gulf and led to a degradation of relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States. The change in US policy under Mr Trump has been generally welcomed in the Gulf monarchies, particularly in Riyadh and the UAE. It is, however, regarded with great suspicion in Europe, particularly as the United States has not articulated a strategy for coping with the nuclear challenge in the wake of its withdrawal from the JCPOA.

36. There is substantial evidence that Iran complied with the terms of the JCPOA as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and reaffirmed by the US intelligence community. In refusing to recertify the agreement and then pulling out of it altogether, President Trump cited a range of Iranian actions including the 1979 hostage crisis.

37. European leaders maintain that they share US concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and its Middle East policy more generally, but do not see these problems as justifying the termination of the JCPOA which, they argue, is narrowly focused on impeding the development of Iranian nuclear weapons and implementing an inspections regime to ensure compliance. There has also been a sub-textual concern in Europe and elsewhere that walking away from the JCPOA could undermine the international community's bargaining leverage with North Korea on matters pertaining to nuclear weapons restrictions. The argument here has been that abandoning JCPOA would deprive North Korea of any incentive to agree to limits on its own nuclear programme as it would communicate such deals can simply be scrapped after they have been signed. This credibility issue is taken very seriously in European circles, and it is another reason why Mr Trump's decision on the JCPOA has been so unwelcome.

38. European concerns about the US decision on the JCPOA extend to the realm of trade. The Trump Administration has announced that it will reimpose trade sanctions on Iran and sanction non-US companies that conduct business with Iran unless they are granted an exceptional relief. Those European firms that decide to continue trading with Iran will be denied access to the US financial system. If such extraterritorial sanctions are imposed on European firms, they would trigger a sharp European response and could further complicate transatlantic relations. It is perhaps instructive that both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron have recently consulted Vladimir Putin on the matter even though he has become something of a pariah as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia (Chazan, 2018). The EU is preparing an array of policies to shield European firms from the impact of US sanctions although these doubtless will not be sufficient, as many large European multinational companies are simply too dependent on the US market to risk inviting sanctions over Iran. Politically this issue is now escalating into a major source of transatlantic tension. Bruno Le Maire, the French Finance Minister, for example, recently said that Europe should not accept the status of vassal to the United States. Other European leaders are looking to appeal for exemption for firms with a particular level of exposure in Iran.

IV. UNITY AND RIVALRY IN THE GULF AND A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES

39. As this draft report has suggested, achieving a higher level of unity on the Gulf peninsula on the best way to approach Iran has been difficult as deeply ingrained rivalries among the Gulf countries persist. Conditioned by diverging strategic, economic, political and ideological ambitions, as well as more prosaic matters such as geographical proximity to Iran and trade and energy ties with it, these rivalries continue to undermine Gulf cooperation. This is one of the principal reasons why the GCC has never assumed the form of a genuine alliance undergirded by an integrated system of collective defence. Simply put, the GCC is not NATO, and its cautious approach to common security challenges is conditioned by persistent underlying differences in strategic ambition and outlook (Miller and Sokolski, 2017). Conflicting economic interests are also apparent. The region is also characterised by significant disparities of wealth and different approaches to national economic policy. Unilateralism and bilateralism tend to feature in regional economic relations rather than multilateral or regional approaches. Despite a degree of rivalry between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, for example, the two

countries recently announced the formation of a new economic and partnership group separate from the GCC that will coordinate economic, political, military and cultural policy (Gambrell, 2017).

40. US policy continues to matter a great deal in the Gulf. Its abiding interests in the Gulf are to ensure the free flow of oil, to prevent terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies, and to limit Iran's capacity to exercise hegemony over the region. Yemen in itself does not challenge this in a significant way and some experts have counselled that the United States exercise caution in picking sides in that complex conflict. The United States and other Western governments would be best advised to stay out of many of the disputes dividing the Gulf countries and work, instead, to help the region find common ground where this might be helpful (Miller and Sokolsky, 2017).

41. This logic may well explain why after initially appearing to endorse the isolation of Qatar, the Trump Administration quickly changed tactics, adopting a more traditional US approach and calling for a resolution of outstanding differences among countries with which it enjoys essentially friendly relations. Both Qatar and Bahrain allow US air and naval forces to use bases located on their territory and Saudi Arabia is engaged in extensive counterterrorism cooperation with their US partners. The embargo on Qatar, however, has inadequately increased Iran's influence on that country simply because Qatar has no alternative at this juncture. But Qatar is not about to join a revolutionary coalition. All of this suggests that it is high time for the key players to take a step back, identify shared interests, and work out ways that the regional order might best accommodate these while building on a shared interest in generating the conditions for stability and prosperity. The current situation, at times, seems to be working against the region's collective interests.

42. As suggested above, it is misleading to understand tensions in the region as somehow rooted in traditional Sunni-Shia and Arab-Persian schisms. There are also, for example, compelling Sunni-Sunni tensions at play. Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood not only impinges on its relations with its Gulf partners but also ramifies into the broader Islamic world where this question is both highly salient and deeply polarising. The government of Egypt, like that of the UAE, for example, has identified the Muslim Brotherhood as a direct threat to national security. Similarly, the Emirati government sees the Muslim Brotherhood as posing an existential threat and it never embraced its rise to power in Egypt during the so-called Arab Spring. While Qatar has provided important support to the Muslim Brotherhood across a range of countries, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been ardent supporters of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government both in political and financial terms. Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan recently ordered the arrests of dozens of Emirati citizens for sympathising with al-Islah, the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Stratfor, 2017).

43. US administrations have long maintained close but sometimes complicated relations with most of the GCC member states, and the Trump Administration early on signalled that the connection with the region's monarchies would be strengthened. Indeed, the President's very first foreign trip was to Saudi Arabia. During that visit, he expressed strong support for that country's posture in the region, particularly regarding Iran. This made a significant impression among other Gulf monarchies, most of which had never supported the Obama Administration's approach to Iran and saw that approach as reflecting a broader US retreat from the region. President Trump's critique of President Barack Obama's approach resonated deeply and strengthened the hand of those in the region pushing for a harder line against Iran.

44. Although the United States has an important air base in Al-Udeid in Qatar, which hosts the US Central Command (previously based in Saudi Arabia), President Trump initially seemed to endorse the Saudi position in its dispute with Qatar (Goujon, 2017). In a series of tweets, the President suggested, among other things, that Qatar was funding a "radical ideology" (Landler, 2017). He later backtracked from what essentially constituted a fundamental break with the traditional US Gulf policy of staying out of such local disputes, and he has since called for dialogue to resolve tensions with the GCC. But that initial signal has had a strong impact on regional diplomacy and continues to affect the calculations of various actors. On his very first trip as Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo travelled to

the Gulf region and essentially communicated to Qatar's 4 GCC partners that the United States wanted to see an end to the embargo on Qatar and the restoration of dialogue and cooperation with Doha. He delivered the same message to Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman al-Saud, and King Salman. This clearly demonstrated that the Trump administration attaches great importance to the resolution of a dispute that is dividing countries which need to work closely together to deal more effectively with a range of regional security challenges (Henderson, 2018).

45. Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia were deeply disappointed with the Obama Administration and what they perceived as its quest to achieve a rapprochement with Iran. Most of the region's governments, apart from Qatar, were also sceptical of President Obama's initial embrace of the so-called Arab Spring and believe that the ensuing instability throughout the Arab world has had tragic consequences for the Middle East and North Africa. US calls for democracy have never been particularly welcome in a region where most of the top leaders hold their position by dint of birth rather than election. President Obama's failure to enforce the so-called "red line" on Syria's use of chemical weapons shook the region and undermined faith in US leadership. Displeasure with Washington, of course, was nothing new. There were also concerns in the region that the Bush Administration's decision to go to war in Iraq had arguably opened the door for increased Iranian interference in that country and ultimately in Syria. And it is worth recalling that the 1973 OPEC oil embargo reflected Gulf anger at US support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war. The Trump Administration's deemphasis on human rights and democracy issues, its hard line on Iran, and its military response to Syria's use of chemical weapons have all been welcomed in the region and suggest a sharp break with the policies of the Obama Administration.

46. Although the monarchies have pronounced strong support for the Trump administration's hard-line views on Iran, they do harbour some concerns about the thinking animating President Trump's broader foreign policy vision. The US decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, for example, was quietly opposed throughout the Gulf and could become a source of friction in the future. There is a strong sense of solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gulf region and the cycle of violence and oppression in Palestine reverberates strongly there. That decision points to potential limits in relations between the region and the current administration in Washington. That said, the Trump Administration's deemphasis on democracy promotion and its renewed stress on containing Iran and conducting a more focused fight against Daesh has proven a relief for Saudi Arabia and its closest regional partners. This relief strongly outweighs any residual concerns about changes in US policy on the Palestinian issue (Goujon, 2017).

47. Energy matters could prove another area of friction between the West and the Gulf. The shale fracking revolution in the United States has made that country a key swing producer of oil and gas. Its production places a sharp limit on the capacity of Gulf states to drive up global prices. Now when global prices surge, highly agile US producers swing into action. US oil and gas production has established a new and lower ceiling on global oil prices and increasingly on global gas prices as this commodity becomes more internationally fungible through liquefaction. Gulf producers had hoped that price falls over the past three years would simply drive higher-cost US producers out of the market. Some US firms did indeed go into bankruptcy, but many others restructured, and those more resilient producers are now back in action as prices rise close to USD 80 a barrel. According to the International Energy Agency, the United States will surpass Saudi Arabia this year and approach Russia as the world's largest oil producer with an output of nearly 100 million barrels a day (Krauss, 2018). The United States' dramatic return to global energy markets will continue to cap energy prices, and this will adversely impact those energy producers, including Russia and Saudi Arabia, that have grown overly dependent on energy sales to achieve budget sustainability.

48. This new dynamic in energy markets could also have diplomatic implications for the Gulf region. US oil and gas production as well as the growing importance of renewable energy in Western countries is imposing some limits on the scope of oil and gas price increases—although burgeoning demand in Asia could counteract some of these effects. In any case, there are justified concerns that

the capacity of the Gulf monarchs to rely heavily on oil and gas production to underwrite extravagant budgets, curry political favour and exercise diplomatic leverage may be diminishing.

49. The Trump Administration's willingness to reimpose a sanctions regime against another major producer, Iran, could be partly reinforced by the fact that the United States is now approaching a degree of hydrocarbon self-sufficiency. Europe, of course, has no such luxury, and this could be one factor in the transatlantic dispute over the US decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear accord. Another longer-term impact of rising US hydrocarbon production could well be to lower the strategic priority the United States accords the Gulf region as a whole. Some felt that this logic was also at least partly animating the Obama Administration's approach to the Gulf.

50. The difficult experience with the Obama Administration and the recognition that the Trump Administration may not reflect an enduring US outlook has left the Gulf states wary of tying themselves too closely to the United States, even though they strongly support many of the current administration's policies. For the moment, the United States remains an indispensable partner and a guarantor of stability for most of the countries of the region. But the Gulf region also seems increasingly willing to establish new partnerships with emerging and traditional players, including China, India and even Russia. There is little support for Bashar al-Assad in the Gulf. Some elements of the Syrian opposition, however, are deemed, by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular, as riddled with extremists who pose more of a threat to their interests. They believe that Russian actions in Syria have been consistent and, at the very least, cleared some space for taking on extremists. From their perspective, Russia deserves a modicum of recognition for the fight against Daesh, despite Moscow's persistent and worrying ties to Iran.

V. THE QATAR CRISIS

51. The most visible expression of discord in the Gulf has been the rift between Qatar and several of the other Gulf monarchies. Long bubbling tensions broke to the surface in May 2017 when the Gulf monarchies announced an embargo on Qatar after a story leaked that the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, had made a speech in which he identified Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, lauded Qatar's very friendly relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, spoke of his country's poor relations with the United States, speculated on President Trump's political longevity, and praised his country's relations with Israel. Qatar later responded that this was a fake story that had been planted by hackers. The FBI subsequently reported that a group had indeed hacked into the agency and planted the story. But the damage was already done (Roberts, 2017). Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain broke relations with Qatar. All Qatari nationals were expelled from those countries, and an air, sea and land blockade on Qatar was imposed. Even if news of the speech was fabricated, it nevertheless touched upon several long-held grievances in the region and triggered a break in relations at a moment of great regional tension and uncertainty.

52. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia and other countries leading the blockade relayed through Kuwait 13 demands on Qatar which they characterised as a precondition for a return to normal relations. These included: drastically scaling back cooperation with Iran, removing Turkish troops from Qatar's soil, ending contact with groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, stopping all contact with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, paying reparations and compensation for loss of life and other financial losses caused by Qatar's policies in recent years; handing over all files detailing Qatar's prior contact with and support for those opposition groups and submitting to monthly external compliance checks. According to some analysts, succumbing to these demands would result in a total annihilation of Qatar's autonomy and independence. Many Western governments have similarly characterised these demands as unreasonable. The British's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, for example, commented that: "Gulf unity can only be restored when all countries involved are willing to discuss terms that are measured and realistic."

53. Early in the life of his administration, President Trump had called on the Gulf countries to create a NATO-like alliance to handle the shared security challenges the region confronts. Given the rivalries that characterised relations among these states, the emergence of a comprehensive alliance within the GCC was unlikely. The Qatar crisis made any movement in this direction unthinkable. Recent US policy has shifted over the past year, with President Trump initially labelling Qatar as a terrorist haven while then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson publicly questioned Saudi Arabia's motives for imposing such a harsh set of demands on an important GCC member which happens to host a key American military base (Wintour, 2017). As indicated earlier, the new Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also called for reconciliation. US policy thus seems to have returned to a more traditional posture with Washington signalling that the interests of all would be best served by a reconciliation between Qatar and its GCC partners. US diplomats are now pushing for dialogue as there are concerns both that a divided GCC is less able to cope with the broader challenges to regional security and that isolating Qatar could push it into Iran's arms.

54. The Qatar crisis has also highlighted broader schisms in the Arab world. Egypt, which strongly opposes Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, has broken relations with it and participated in the embargo. The break has not entirely isolated Qatar, however, as Oman, Turkey, India and Iran, among others, have provided it with a commercial life line.

55. Tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia are nothing new. Problems were already apparent when Qatar established its independence from Saudi Arabia. Under the influence of Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, son of the Emir of Qatar, an open discussion began in the early 1980s on the virtue of pursuing a more independent foreign policy line which would include improved relations with Iran and a degree of cooperation with Israel. The Saudis opposed both moves. To the chagrin of Saudi leaders, Hamad overthrew his father in 1995 and began to implement some of these ideas. A year later, Qatar launched Al Jazeera, which provided a very different view of the prevailing strategic, political and social order on the Peninsula and gained a huge audience across the Middle East and beyond because of the new perspectives it offered. This angered several leaders in the region, none more so than those in Saudi Arabia, which in 2002 withdrew its ambassador from Qatar. The ambassador only returned in 2008 when Qatar agreed to limit Al Jazeera's coverage of Saudi Arabia.

56. Problems began again in the wake of the Arab Spring when Qatar seemed to align itself with those in the street rather than with the governments of countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. It closely allied itself with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which has long operated across the region and which Qatar characterises as moderate - a view not shared by other governments in the region, even though Saudi Arabia itself once hosted Muslim Brothers in exile. It also linked itself to Hamas in Palestine and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Qatar claimed that its policy aimed to exercise a moderating influence on these groups and that it had, for example, managed to convince al-Nusra to break with al-Qaeda. The argument failed to convince Qatar's neighbours (Roberts, 2017).

57. When Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani replaced his father as Emir in 2013, Saudi Arabia responded by increasing pressure on the government to move away from these positions. Although Sheikh al-Thani made several concessions to his GCC partners, he did not fundamentally break with those states and groups opposed by the other Gulf monarchs. A huge ransom of one billion USD paid to an Iraqi Shia militia group that had kidnapped a Qatari royal hunting party may have been the straw that broke the camel's back and helped set the stage for the crisis in Gulf relations that unfolded in 2017 (Solomon, 2017).

58. The crisis in regional relations has included a trade embargo against Qatar although Oman, Iran and Turkey have helped move goods to that country. Turkey has sent cargo ships and planes to help Qatar weather the storm and is now playing the role of an external guarantor of Qatar's security. This has provoked the ire of Saudi Arabia (Al Jazeera, 2017). India, whose citizens make up the largest expatriate group in the region and remit roughly USD 40 billion a year, has also found itself in an

uncomfortable position. It has taken a neutral position on the crisis while continuing commercial relations with Qatar (Sajjanhar, 2017).

59. As suggested above, the stand-off with Qatar is not sectarian even if it has somehow been linked to Shia Iran. The Qatari monarchy and the country's elites are Sunni and the country has developed ties with Iran for reasons that have nothing to do with religion. Indeed, sectarian explanations for such phenomena tend to obscure the true nature of the underlying power struggles at play in the region which are better understood as driven by the regimes' need to maintain their claims to legitimacy in a context in which democratic validation is generally not seen as an option. From this perspective, any resort to the language of sectarianism is more of a diversionary tactic than a fundamental strategy.

60. Ultimately, tensions within the GCC have implications for the unity of the region and for the role of external powers which may be tempted to exploit these differences for ends which might be antithetical to the region's broader interests. "What will end up emerging out of this GCC imbroglio is not a viable Arab NATO streamlining its regional security policy, but a much messier reality for Washington to contend with as it tries to navigate the fractious geopolitics of the Gulf" (Goujon, 2017). Ultimately, Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners may have to find a way to climb down from some of their demands on Qatar in order to move towards resolving this unwelcome crisis. The current status quo is damaging. It undermines GCC solidarity and is blocking the practical cooperation needed to cope with a range of important challenges affecting the region. The Gulf's Western partners need to help the region work towards a common reading of the problem as a first step in unearthing how the crisis might best be resolved.

VI. THE CONFLICT IN YEMEN

61. The tragic conflict in Yemen between the government and Houthi rebels initially reflected an ethnically or tribally conditioned struggle for power. It has, however, become a playing field for a range of external powers with concerns that transcend those of the Yemeni people. Indeed, regional rivalries, fears and ambitions have exacerbated what began as a set of domestic grievances. In effect, the conflict in Yemen has very unfortunately become a proxy war pitting Iran and militia groups linked to it against Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners. Saudi Arabia has assembled a coalition, diverse in means and ambitions, to support government forces and has led a campaign against the Houthi rebels who overthrew the Yemeni government in 2014. That coalition includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan. That coalition has received US and British support.

62. Saudi Arabia has publicly characterised the Houthi rebellion as an Iranian gambit to extend its influence into this strategic territory straddling the Red Sea and the Gulf. Its military campaign has been led by the ambitious young Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The intervention has been broadly interpreted as an effort by Saudi leaders to demonstrate that the country is prepared to act even when great powers counsel restraint. It can also be understood a very tangible response to the perception that the United States under President Obama had begun to deprioritise the Gulf in its own strategic calculus while seeking a new *modus vivendi* with Iran, as expressed in the nuclear treaty (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2017). Saudi policy was informed by a kind of neo-domino theory, which is not so different from the thinking that animated US's intervention in Vietnam. According to that logic, the fall of Yemen to forces closely aligned with or directly supported by Iran would immediately threaten neighbouring countries. Caught up in this line of thinking, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have become far more engaged in the conflict than either had originally expected.

63. Like Saudi Arabia, the UAE's military involvement in the Yemen conflict has also been driven by deep concerns about Iran's ambitions. The UAE seems intent on limiting the spaces where extremism might flourish. Moreover, it may also harbour latent concerns about Saudi ambitions. Indeed, there are clear indications that the country's leaders were not happy with the initial Saudi

intervention and entered the fray, in part, to maintain a degree of influence over events there. The UAE, however, shares Saudi apprehensions that the absence of authority in Yemen has opened the door for extremist organisations like al-Qaeda and Daesh. But there are cracks in the coalition growing out of a quiet rivalry between the two partners (Khashan, 2017).

64. The UAE has been particularly active in the south of Yemen and supported the southern militia organised by the Southern Transitional Council, which seized the port city of Aden in January 2018. It is increasingly asserting its own claims for southern autonomy and now independence. Saudi Arabia, however, has supported the internationally recognised government of Yemeni President Abdu Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, which lost the capital, Sanna, and a significant part of the North to Houthi rebels. While southern factions were initially allied with government forces, the growing split between the two has now reached the point where southern militia units supported by the UAE have been fighting government forces in Aden. These recent developments obviously cast a shadow over the UAE-Saudi coalition as these two countries are now backing competing forces that harbour very different ambitions for the country (Sanchez, 2018). The fracturing of coalitions has also occurred on the rebel side. In December 2017, Houthi rebels killed their erstwhile ally, former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, for making overtures to the government with the support of the UAE. His execution has further complicated coalition efforts to find an exit from what is proving an ever more intractable and complex conflict.

65. The toll of this war has indeed been very high and as is so often the case, civilians have paid the highest price. By May 2018, the Council on Foreign Relations estimated that the war was responsible for the deaths of 16,200 Yemeni civilians, 87 Emirati troops and according to a recent Al Jazeera report, more than 1,000 Saudi fighters. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres recently called the war the world's worst humanitarian crisis. It is estimated that 22.2 million people need assistance in that country while 2 million have been displaced (Edros, 2017; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Today there are millions of Yemenis confronting severe food and water shortages and disease. While hundreds of thousands of Syrians were able to flee violence and the deprivation of war, the Yemeni are largely stuck within the borders of their country and many are dying as a result. Yemen is both the most populated and the poorest country on the peninsula, and it clearly lacks the resilience to weather this storm. Famine has been one of the most tragic consequences and poor sanitary conditions have meant that millions do not have access to clean drinking water and have been vulnerable to diseases like cholera. In these conditions, child marriage rates have soared and nearly two thirds of girls are now married before they are 18 and often before the age of 15. The mass suffering is likely to have important and enduring consequences for the region and beyond.

66. In 2015, UAE forces took the city of Aden in a sophisticated amphibious military action that demonstrated the serious capabilities of the country's small but highly effective armed forces. These forces have learned a great deal from various deployments in Libya, in Afghanistan, during the counter-ISIS air campaign and now in Yemen. Since that operation, their forces have expanded, and the UAE military has worked to train units which are operating on the front lines in this struggle. They have also deployed forces in the East, some of which have been mercenaries from Colombia, to conduct counterterrorism operations (Hager and Mazzetti, 2015).

67. The UAE is currently the second largest aid provider to Yemen after Saudi Arabia, and is providing support to underwrite healthcare, water supplies, energy generation, transport and government support for civil society. The UAE's leaders take very seriously the notion that their country has a special role to play in building regional and international security, and Yemen has become something of a test case for UAE leaders. This has come at a price, as the country has suffered serious casualties in the Yemen conflict; yet it has not sought to obfuscate these losses. Rather, the government has openly honoured these sacrifices with an annual national martyrs' day.

68. The most serious problem in all of this may be that neither Saudi Arabia and the UAE nor their partners are addressing the core sources of fracture and instability in Yemen. According to some analysts, the view that the Houthis are simply puppets of the Iranian regime is problematic and

understates the complexity of the situation and the legitimacy of some of their complaints. The insurgency itself was originally the product of very local issues including the absence of public services like schools and hospitals in Houthi regions. Long standing North-South fractures are also evidently at play. This is essentially an internal civil war in a weak and fragmented country that has always been closer to a tribal confederacy than to a modern state. It is therefore misleading simply to portray the challenge in terms of containing Iran, as to do so implies that there is actually a military solution to a highly complex set of social and political problems.

69. As suggested above, the United States and the United Kingdom have provided clear support to the coalition. The United States has carried out a range of counterterrorism operations in Yemen, and has employed airstrikes on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and militants linked to Daesh. In 2016, the United States carried out roughly 35 strikes in Yemen and the number grew to 130 in 2017. In April 2016, the United States deployed a small number of forces to assist Saudi-led troops in retaking territory from AQAP (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Other allies, however, have taken a totally different approach. Norway, for example, decided to cease arms sales to Saudi Arabia because of the conflict in Yemen and the massive human suffering it has induced. Some are now arguing that Europe and the United States should use their influence to bring all sides to the bargaining table and work for a rapid cease-fire to end the human suffering in this beleaguered country.

70. Finally, the war in Yemen has grown increasingly controversial, not only within the international community at large but also in the region itself. The rising numbers of casualties - more than 10,000 people killed and millions threatened by disease and famine - the failure to move the situation to resolution, conflicting ambitions within the GCC, and the sheer extent and cost of war have rendered any resolution to this conflict far more difficult than originally imagined. It has also had reputational costs for the protagonists. The UN, for example, recently blacklisted the military coalition for killing and injuring hundreds of children in the conflict, even as it said that this same coalition had taken steps to improve child protection (Sanchez, 2018). The blacklist was attached to the UN annual report on children in armed conflict and named the Houthi rebel group, Yemen government forces, pro-government militia, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as responsible of violations against children in 2016. The 2017 blacklist is split into two categories. The first category, which includes the Saudi-led military coalition, lists parties that have put in place measures to protect children. The second category includes parties that have not (Nichols, 2017). None of this is welcome news for the Gulf states, and they have much to lose if this conflict persists indefinitely. Western governments as well as key players from the region will eventually have to focus more attention on finding a settlement to a conflict which has exacted a terrible toll on the Yemeni people.

VII. NATO AND THE GULF

71. At the July 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, government leaders called for the “establishment of regular working-level ties between the secretariats of NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council”. The idea was to build on the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) launched 12 years prior in which NATO recognised the strategic importance of the Gulf for the Alliance and opened several of its partnership programmes to interested GCC members. Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE joined the initiative while Saudi Arabia and Oman remained outside the formal arrangements, although both have expressed an interest in developing contacts with NATO. The ICI has sought to contribute to regional and global security by extending to the countries of the Gulf an opportunity to cooperate with the Alliance across a broad array of functional areas. The partnerships are individual, and each country can determine its own priorities and the level of participation.

72. The ICI is premised on several key principles including: Non-discrimination: all ICI partners are offered the same basis for their cooperation with NATO. Self-differentiation: a tailored approach to the specific needs of each of our ICI partner countries. Individual Partnership Cooperation Programmes (IPCP) allow interested ICI countries and NATO to frame their practical cooperation in a more

prospective and focused way, enabling interested countries to outline the main short and long-term objectives of their cooperation with the Alliance, in accordance with NATO's objectives and policies for the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Inclusiveness: all ICI countries should see themselves as stakeholders of the same cooperative effort. Two-way engagement: the ICI is a "two-way" partnership, in which NATO seeks partners' contribution for its success, through a regular consultation process; special emphasis is placed on practical cooperation. Non-imposition: ICI partners are free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with the Alliance; NATO has no wish to impose anything upon them. Complementarity and mutual reinforcement: efforts of the ICI and other international institutions for the region are complementary and mutually reinforcing in nature. Diversity: the ICI respects and considers the specific regional, cultural and political contexts of the respective partners (NATO, 2011).

73. In practical terms, this initiative focuses on defence transformation across a range of area including defence budgeting, defence planning and civil military relations. It involves military to military cooperation including exercises. Partners work with NATO allies on counterterrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, border security, arms trafficking and civil emergency planning. The ICI recognised a range of shared interests among NATO members and the Gulf Monarchies and these shared interests have endured. They include freedom of navigation, the fight against nuclear proliferation and against terrorism and a common recognition of the danger of state failure (Koch, 2016).

74. It is worth noting that both NATO and the GCC are part of the Global Coalition Against Daesh. In 2012, NATO cooperated closely with Qatar and the UAE in Operation *Unified Protector* in Libya. The UAE has also participated in NATO military missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Afghanistan. NATO considers this operational experience as an important practical test of the partnership, and it has deepened its ties with the UAE in recent months.

75. NATO's Military Command in Naples has played a key role in this operational coordination. The Joint Force Command is, among other things, charged with managing NATO cooperative security programmes with these partner countries. The newly opened NATO Strategic Direction South Hub is focusing on a range of issues of direct relevance to its GCC partners, including the fight against terrorism, the problem of radicalisation, migration and even environmental concerns and their potential strategic impacts. The Strategic Direction South Hub seeks to bolster regional situational awareness and to encourage a shared understanding of regional threats, challenges and opportunities. It manages and shares the collected information and assists partners in implementing individual partnership and cooperation programmes and has established Defence Capacity Building Programmes with partners in the Middle East and North Africa.

76. The growing formal partnership is buoyed by several shared strategic interests. Obviously, there is broad agreement between the GCC and many NATO member governments on the nature of the Syrian challenge as well as the problem of terrorism, although there are often differences of interpretation. All of this has deepened the relationship between NATO and the Gulf region. Even if Saudi Arabia and Oman remain outside of a formal partnership agreement with NATO, they have not ruled out the possibility of eventually entering one. Meanwhile, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE have all opened diplomatic missions at NATO headquarters, which has helped deepen their cooperation with the Alliance and their understanding of its inner workings.

77. There is an interest in the Gulf in deriving lessons from NATO's long experience in coalition and alliance management. Indeed, the relationship has been helped, at least implicitly, by the notion that NATO may represent something of a model for GCC countries, insofar as they share at least a nominal interest in greater regional defence cooperation and an even higher degree of interoperability and integration. At the GCC Summit held in Doha in December 2014, for example, Gulf leaders expressed a commitment to accelerating defence integration. As this draft report suggests, the absence of a common strategic outlook and a shared strategic ambition may limit what the GCC can achieve in this regard, at least for the moment. That said, the Yemen conflict has raised discussions

about creating a joint military force, although progress on this front has been more rhetorical than actual (Koch, 2016).

78. Working with NATO can nonetheless prove beneficial. The UAE experience is potentially instructive. UAE officials see their closer ties with NATO as a key component of their regional posture. The country has opened a mission to NATO and recently agreed to a partnership programme in order to further practical operational cooperation with the Alliance. This includes a series of training programmes to advance Emirati leadership skills and to facilitate its participation in collective missions. Last year, the UAE signed an agreement for an individual partnership programme which covers a broad range of areas for cooperation with the Alliance, including arms control, chemical weapons, gender issues, energy, the law of armed conflict, public diplomacy, logistics, border security, command and control, civil emergency planning and disaster management, among others. UAE military personnel are now participating in a range of NATO training courses and exercises, one of which the UAE will host in 2020. All of this should facilitate UAE participation in selected NATO and bilateral operations.

79. The UAE is also working bilaterally with a number of NATO members on military and security matters including the United States, the United Kingdom and France. It has a special accord with the United Kingdom, for example, to help it in deterring threats and possible aggression. Both countries engage in joint planning with the aim of strengthening deterrence in the region and the British maintain an air support base in the UAE as well as a significant maritime presence in the region. The French maintain a naval base in Abu Dhabi and work closely on security matters with the host country. Some UAE pilots are training with the French and currently the Mirage aircraft. Many UAE officers are taking courses in France and this along with joint and regional exercises, has helped both deepen bilateral ties and enhance interoperability. The vast uninhabited space of the country's desert is a perfect region for conducting air exercises (NATO PA, Visit to Abu Dhabi).

80. For its part, the United States bases the 380th Air Expeditionary Wing in the UAE. The base delivers air power in support of the fight against Daesh. The planning of these operations, however, takes place at the US base in Qatar. US air assets are deployed to maintain security in the broader Gulf region and defend it from threats emanating from Iran or transnational terrorist organisations. The United States is also operating a Patriot missile defence system in the country. US forces based in the UAE since 1996 also work closely with regional and international partners on a range of issues like command and control and joint training.

81. It should be apparent, given the heterogeneity and rivalries that characterise relations in the Gulf, that the construction of a region-wide alliance to regulate security challenges might seem an elusive goal. And indeed, so far, the Gulf monarchies have not displayed the broad sense of collective purpose needed to build an alliance along the lines of NATO. The GCC has been the closest approximation of such an alliance, and it reflects both many of the region's conflicting interests and aspirations to assume the mantle of a genuine collective security pact.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

82. Despite the reformist impulse that appears to be sweeping through the Gulf, the region remains vulnerable and potentially unstable. The US security umbrella has long provided a stop gap to that insecurity and its presence has been enormously helpful in maintaining a degree of stability in the region. This has provided room for these societies to develop economically and to move their primary energy commodities to world markets.

83. The Arab uprising and the US response to those complex events, as well as the re-emergence of the United States as a world energy power and the new foreign policy of the Trump Administration, have altered the dynamics of the relationship between the United States and the Gulf. Although the United States remains the principal external provider of security in the region, its own priorities have

shifted. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE have applauded the tough line the Trump Administration has taken on Iran, uncertainties persist, and US Gulf policy seems to have diverged from that of its European allies, particularly over matters related to the Iran nuclear deal. At the same time, the Gulf monarchies have shown a mounting inclination to take security matters into their own hands. The record here is decidedly mixed as the Yemen conflict suggests. It is thus important for the West to remain engaged with this vital region and to structure its engagement to help the region build a more peaceful, cooperative and secure order. This demands that the United States and Europe get on the same page—which has become more difficult given the fall-out over the Iran nuclear agreement.

84. Western allies clearly need to work to develop a common position on Iran and specifically on how to deal with the Iran nuclear programme. The Trump Administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA marked a genuine set-back for those who saw in this agreement not only a means to stymie Iran's nuclear ambitions, but also a pathway for dialogue with Tehran's more moderate factions. European governments have argued that economic engagement with Iran would likely empower those factions in favour of positive engagement with the rest of the world while the Trump Administration, Israel and the Gulf countries believe that such engagement would only provide an economic foundation to underwrite Iranian aggression. It is difficult to rectify these two views and it is noteworthy that, in this case, the United States is much closer to its Gulf allies than it is to its European ones. At this juncture the prospect of a new deal seems remote, while tension between the United States and its allies over this issue has become a matter of serious concern. If European companies are targeted for violating the U.S. embargo, these tensions could mount.

85. NATO should develop closer ties with the countries participating in the Istanbul Initiative, as well as with Saudi Arabia and Oman. The dialogue with Saudi Arabia has deepened in recent years and there is potential for fruitful cooperation. Obviously, bilateral relations are also important. Beyond the United States, allied countries like the United Kingdom, Turkey and France are also playing an important role in the Gulf region and are working to deepen security there. This important work, which is reinforced by vital economic ties, should continue. But allied countries should work together.

86. The NATO allies should make the resolution of the dispute between Qatar and its GCC partners a priority. The conflict undermines regional solidarity and security and it has important humanitarian and economic consequences.

87. The US has a key role to play in the Gulf as it maintains strong relations with all sides, is the region's preeminent military power, and is well positioned to mediate. Within the GCC, Kuwait can also play a helpful mediation role, although it obviously lacks the weight of a country such as the United States. If the GCC remains so deeply divided, it will not be well positioned to craft common approaches to Iran or to undertake shared reform efforts. Conducting an economic embargo on a fellow GCC member exacts an economic toll on all and lowers the prospects for deeper regional economic integration. This crisis should not be allowed to escalate any further.

88. To varying degrees, the countries of the Gulf have much work to do to improve the human rights situation. Many are denied basic rights, summary arrests are common, women's rights remain problematic despite some progress in some countries, and the exploitation of guest workers remains widespread although some improvements have been made on this front as well. Progress in any of these areas is partly due to the fact that the international community has never taken these matters off of the diplomatic agenda, and they should continue to push on this front. Over the long run, stability in the region will, in part, hinge on broadening human rights protections.

89. External mediation is also needed to bring an end to the crisis in Yemen. This evolving conflict has only worsened in recent months and the humanitarian situation is a tragedy of epic proportions. Moreover, the war threatens to further divide the GCC as the UAE and Saudi Arabia increasingly seem to harbour conflicting ambitions. Putting an end to the violence will not be easy and the stakes are rising. A focused international effort is now essential. For its part, the NATO PA should continue to engage with the governments, leaders, and civil societies of the region on these matters as well as

on the many shared security and diplomatic challenges confronting NATO members and the countries of the Gulf. More contacts will increase mutual understanding, trust, and provide an avenue for vital dialogue on these matters.

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