



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 2

Collective Security in the Gulf: Prospects for Pan-Gulf Cooperation

Workshop Directors:

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad

Former Indian Ambassador
to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE
Indian Foreign Service
Email: talmiz.ahmad@gmail.com

Prof. Tim Niblock

Emeritus Professor
of Middle Eastern Politics
University of Exeter
United Kingdom
Email: T.C.Niblock@exeter.ac.uk

Prof. Degang Sun

Middle East Studies Institute Shanghai
International Studies University
China
Email: sdgsdg@163.com

Abstract

In modern times, security issues in the Gulf have involved prominent external involvement at every stage – whether in terms of supporting existing governments/states against domestic change or external attack, or seeking to influence foreign policies, or monitoring or controlling the movement of shipping and naval vessels in the waters of the Gulf and the sea-lanes leading to and from the Gulf. On a number of occasions, one or other of the governments of the Gulf has proposed establishing a collective security organisation covering the eight countries of the Gulf (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq and Iran), such that these states gain primary responsibility for and control of their own security. Some domestic and external observers have also put forward proposals to that effect.

Yet, in the past such proposals have never become the focus of widespread debate, whether between the governments of the Gulf or among interested researchers and observers. The response and the assumption has always been that such schemes are idealistic but unrealistic: the realities of the Gulf are such that some of the governments and regimes of the Gulf (especially those of the oil-producing Arab monarchies and emirates) feel too insecure to risk their survival on arrangements with states which may themselves threaten their security.

Today, however, the constellations of international politics, and the dynamics of the Gulf region and its surrounding environment, are substantially transforming the security environments of all eight states. The character of the regional threats which they face, the value of existing alliances, the emergence of new international actors with strong interests in the region, and the shifting domestic bases underpinning regimes, require all of the states to re-calibrate their security strategies and priorities. Creating a collective security organisation for the region, bringing together all eight states is an option which now requires serious and urgent consideration.

The possible initiating processes, feasibility, optimum structuring and strategic scope all of these require detailed analysis, as does the issue of how a Gulf collective security organisation, or even a framework initially, might relate to external powers and groupings. It is to this important task of analysis and consideration that the proposed workshop will address itself. The central concern will be to identify the parameters within which a Gulf security organisation or framework could function, and the dynamics which might facilitate/impede its effective establishment and organisation. It is to be hoped that the deeper understanding of the factors involved in creating a collective security architecture will feed into Gulf governmental consideration of this issue, enabling the consideration to be better informed and more coherent than it might otherwise be. The workshop's concerns should also enable external powers to develop their own strategies with respect to a new pan-Gulf collective security entity.

Description and Rationale

Objectives and Scope of the Proposed Workshop

As noted in the abstract, this workshop will seek to identify the parameters within which a Gulf security entity could function, and the dynamics which might facilitate/impede its effective establishment and organisation. A deeper understanding of the factors involved in creating a collective security framework is important. It should enable governmental and non-governmental bodies within and outside the region to give proper consideration

to the initiation, feasibility, optimum structuring and strategic scope of such a development.

In order to achieve the above objective, the workshop will need to give attention to the following factors and concerns:

1. The experience with collective security frameworks elsewhere, and the aspects of these which may be of use in taking forward a pan-Gulf collective security organisation.
2. The character and extent of the changes in international, regional and domestic politics which are transforming the security dilemmas facing Gulf States and regimes.
3. The range of security options which are now available to Gulf governments.
4. Organisational structures, scope of responsibility and key characteristics appropriate for a pan-Gulf collective security entity.
5. Possible approaches appropriate to resolving current rivalries/conflicts/disputes (especially the Saudi-Iranian divide):
6. Process of initiation: Role of domestic, regional or international actors in encouraging/supporting Gulf States to move towards collective security entity.
 - a. Domestic NGOs and public opinion
 - b. Regional bodies (the Arab League etc.)
 - c. The BRICS governments (singly or collectively)
 - d. European governments (the EU collectively, or individual governments)
 - e. The United States
7. The likely positions taken by, and concerns of, the Gulf governments:
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Iran
 - Oman
 - Kuwait
 - Bahrain
 - Qatar
 - The UAE
 - Iraq

The position of Yemen, whether as a potential participant or as a country affected by the development of Gulf collective security, also needs consideration.
8. How external powers may relate to a Gulf collective security entity once it is established.
 - The BRICS countries (singly or collectively)
 - European countries (singly or through the EU collectively)
 - The United States

- Other countries

While the central concern is with the processes of creating, and possible characteristics of, a Gulf collective security entity, the background factors which affect these processes and characteristics will be given close attention. Of critical importance here is how the rivalries, divisions and hostilities which have characterised intra-Gulf relations in recent times can be overcome (in particular, but not exclusively, the Iran-Saudi confrontation). The latter requires analyses which take full account of the nature of regimes and of the possibilities for transformation within them. Every effort will be made to avoid simplistic organisational solutions to the collective security problem which take no account of the historical, ideological and political dynamics which underpin the existing policies pursued by governments. This requires, furthermore, assessments to be made of the prospects for change within the regimes of the region. Such assessments need to be set within the analytical and theoretical context of regime transformation globally.

So also does full account need to be taken of how the external environment impinges on security issues in the Gulf region. This, in turn, requires analysis of the changing global order (both economic and political) and the impact which this is having on how external powers view their interests in the region. Both globally and within the region the predominance of the United States and Europe can no longer be taken for granted. Nor can it be assumed that the United States and Europe will continue to see their presence in the Gulf as critical to their wider global interests. The markets of the Gulf region are now more closely linked to South and East Asian markets than they are to those of the Western world. There is, moreover, every reason to believe that this represents a trend which will be strengthened yet further in the future, creating a wider Asian sphere of mutual dependency. This is likely to cover energy connectivities, flows of investment as well as those of trade. Discussion of a collective security organisation in the Gulf, therefore, needs to be set within the framework of global economic and political change: how the powers which currently have a predominant security involvement in the Gulf see their interests in a changing world order, and how the world's rising powers see (and will in the future envisage) theirs.

The workshop will seek to avoid approaches which suggest that responsibility for security in the Gulf will or should pass from existing external powers to other external powers. The approach, rather, puts the Gulf States themselves at the centre of decision-making and potential conflict resolution in the security sphere. The role which external powers can play as facilitators of this process will depend in part on what they can offer the Gulf region – not so much in terms of security support, but more in terms of the help they can give in binding the Gulf region into wider international networks of communication, trade, investment global political inclusion. The collective interests of

the Gulf States in wider systems of exchange and engagement will be critical in shaping the region into a cohesive regional entity.

Although papers may cover only one small part of the whole picture, it will be important for them to be conceived with the wider picture in mind. What it is hoped will come out of the workshop will not be recommendations on what Gulf governments should do. Rather, the objective, as stated in the abstract, is to create a deeper understanding of the factors involved in creating a collective security framework. The latter, it is to be hoped, can then feed into Gulf governmental consideration of this issue, enabling the consideration to be better informed and more coherent than it might otherwise be. It should also help outside governments prepare for – and if possible facilitate - a changing regional order in the Gulf, where the Gulf States take charge of their own security interests.

Contribution to the Expansion of Gulf Studies

This is a field which is barely touched upon in the existing literature of Gulf Studies. In view of its potential importance to ongoing developments in the Gulf region, it is likely to become increasingly important in the future. There is, therefore, considerable potential for the workshop to stake out for the GRCC a central position in demarcating the parameters for discussion and consideration of possible collective security arrangements in the Gulf. This is what the workshop will seek to achieve, bringing together a group of researchers interested in taking this new field forward.

The existing literature which has relevance to the field has, in fact, mainly been developed within the framework of the first six Gulf Research Meetings, and has been published in the books which followed from them. Talmiz Ahmad and Tim Niblock, two of the joint convenors for the proposed workshop, have pursued the themes of global political and economic change and how the Gulf is affected by this – with conclusions being drawn about the need for Gulf States to take control of their own security – in the course of the earlier workshops. The convenors will seek to make available to paper-presenters the relevant chapters of these earlier works, so that there is continuity between previous contributions and the 2016 contributions.

Anticipated Participants

The papers sought will be ones which relate to the “factors and concerns” listed above. Given the wide ambit of these factors and concerns, and the intention to limit paper-acceptances to no more than 16, it is to be expected that papers may straddle a number of different issue-areas (for example, it would be possible for to have a comparative paper

on the “likely positions taken on collective security” by the smaller GCC states, rather than taking just one of them). All participants will be expected to demonstrate a concern with the wider framework within which the workshop has been conceived.

While we would not at this stage wish to allocate a specific number of papers to each of the factors and concerns listed, we would seek to ensure that there is a good overall balance – with no significant dimension neglected. We would also ensure that the participation in the workshop is diverse in terms of the geographical and gender backgrounds of the participants, so that the workshop benefits from a good diversity of perspectives. The Gulf participation is regarded as being of particular importance.

Workshop Director Profiles

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1974. Early in his career, he was posted to Kuwait and Baghdad, was Charge d’Affaires in Sanaa in 1979-81, and then Consul General in Jeddah (1987-90). He headed the Gulf/Hajj Division in the Ministry of External Affairs in 1998-2000. He was Ambassador to Saudi Arabia twice (2000-03 and 2010-11); to Oman (2003-04), and the UAE (2007-10). He was also Additional Secretary responsible for international cooperation in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs, India's premier foreign policy think-tank (2004-17). At the end of his tenure as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia in August 2011, the Saudi government conferred on him the King Abdulaziz Medal First Class in recognition of his role in the promotion of Indo-Saudi relations. After retirement from foreign service, he joined the corporate sector for three years as President based in Dubai of an Indo-German joint venture, with responsibility for business development in West Asia, North Africa and Central Asia. He is now an independent consultant based in Dubai and is advising Indian and local companies on business expansion and diversification.

He has authored three books: *Reform in the Arab World: External Influences and Regional Debates* (2005); *Children of Abraham at War: the Clash of Messianic Militarisms* (2010), and *The Islamist Challenge in West Asia: Doctrinal and Political Competitions after the Arab Spring* (2013). He writes and lectures frequently on political Islam, the politics and economics of West Asia, and energy security issues.

Prof. Tim Niblock is Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of Exeter. He is also currently Visiting Professor at Shaanxi Normal University, Xi’an, and has held the position of Vice-President of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies, and Vice-President of the British Society for Middle East Studies. He was the founding Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter,

and previously served at the University of Khartoum, the University of Reading, and the University of Durham.

Among his published books are: *The United States and the Gulf: Shifting Pressures, Strategies and Alignments* (jointly edited with Steve Hook); *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region* (edited, with Yang Guang, 2014); *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century. The Local to Global Transformation* (edited, with Monica Malik, 2013), *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (2007), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (2006), *'Pariah States' and Sanctions in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya and Sudan* (2001), *Class and Power in Sudan* (1987), *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (edited, 1982), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (edited, 1981), and *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (edited, 1980).

Prof. Degang Sun is Professor and Deputy Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China. He was an academic visitor to the Middle East Centre, Oxford University, and Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013). His research interest is China and the Middle East. His most recent works are: *Quasi-alliance Diplomacy in Theory and Practice: An Empirical Studies of the Relations between Great Powers and the Middle East* (Beijing: World Affairs, 2012); "China's Response to the Revolts in the Arab World: A Case of Pragmatic Diplomacy", (*Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2014, with Professor Yahia Zoubir); and "China's Economic Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries: Challenges Ahead?" (*Journal of Contemporary China*, forthcoming, with Professor Yahia Zoubir).

Selected Readings

Steve Hook and Tim Niblock (eds), *The United States and the Gulf: Shifting Pressures, Strategies and Alignments* (Gerlach, 2015);

Tim Niblock (ed with Yang Guang), *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region* (Gerlach, 2014);

Ranjit Gupta, Abu Backer Bagader, Talmiz Ahmad and N. Janardhan (eds), *New Gulf Security Architecture: Prospects and Challenges for Asia* (Gerlach, 2014);

Tim Niblock (ed. with Monica Malik), *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century: The Local to Global Transformation* (Gerlach, 2013);

Ranjit Gupta, Abu Backer Bagader, Talmiz Ahmad and N. Janardhan(eds), *India and the Gulf: What Next?* (Gulf Research Center, 2013).

Degang Sun, “The Strategic Evolution of US Military Presence in Iraq”, in Omar Al-Ubaydli and Andrea Plebani (eds), *GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective* (Gulf Research Center, 2014).