



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

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Workshop No. 2

The GCC between the Kurdistan Region and Iraq

1. Directors

Marianna Charountaki

Senior Lecturer in International Politics, University of Lincoln

Inna Rudolf

Senior Research Fellow, King's College London

2. Abstract

In this insightful and comprehensive workshop, we will unravel the intricate tapestry of relationships among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the federal government of Iraq, post the pivotal Kurdish independence referendum in 2017. Our exploration will begin by delving into the evolution of these relationships, especially in light of Iraq's strategic pivot to the Gulf, a trajectory championed by former Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhimi and continued under the current leadership of Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani.

Beginning with an exploration of the evolution of these relationships, particularly in the context of Iraq's strategic pivot to the Gulf, our discussion will critically analyze the GCC's strategic engagement with both the KRG and Baghdad, especially in the aftermath of the pivotal Kurdish independence referendum in 2017. We will meticulously examine the nuanced approaches of Gulf nations as they navigate Iraq's diplomatic recalibration towards the Gulf, exploring the multifaceted strategies employed. Our discussion aims to shed light on how the GCC has tactically maneuvered within this complex landscape.

A key focus of our conversation will be the deepening political, economic, and social ties between the GCC and Iraq. We will scrutinize the impact of Iraq's diplomatic overtures and strategic alignment with Gulf nations, providing an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by GCC officials. These challenges are exacerbated by internal power struggles and partisan conflicts within both Baghdad and Erbil, creating intricate hurdles in formulating a coherent foreign policy

approach. We will dissect the strategies employed by the GCC in navigating these delicate balances, seeking stability and cooperation amid regional tensions.

Our discussion will also delve into the vital area of security sector cooperation between GCC nations and both Kurdish and federal Iraqi authorities. Specifically, we will analyze collaborative efforts in combatting cross-border challenges, such as environmental degradation, drug smuggling, and the movement of non-state actors. Our workshop of experts will shed light on existing mechanisms, successes achieved, and areas requiring further cooperation and improvement, such as investments in the advancement of technological and social innovations.

We will address the significant influence of entities like the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in both federal Iraq and contested territories. Through a nuanced analysis, we will explore how the presence and leverage of these groups have shaped the threat perceptions of GCC countries. By dissecting these multifaceted relationships, the workshop participants will provide valuable insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape of the GCC within the context of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

Further aspects such as foreign policy and its impact on the formulation of regional politics are central. Moreover, the role of energy, trade, and law are of equal importance given the fact that shared experiences can facilitate further such inter-relations. From this equation, we cannot exclude the role of regional and international aspects of the subject matter under scrutiny, including the actors involved.

Finally, the workshop will address the topic of Iraq's relations with Syria, Turkey, and Iran, shedding light on how these bilateral relationships impact the leverage of the KRG vis-a-vis Baghdad. By dissecting the complexities of Iraq's engagements with its neighbouring nations, participants will gain valuable insights into the regional geopolitical landscape, enabling a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the KRG. Through thoughtful analysis, participants will brainstorm innovative solutions to strengthen the KRG's status, fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and contributing to the region's stability and prosperity.

Join us for an engaging conversation that promises to unravel the complexities of regional politics and diplomacy. Through rigorous analysis and expert insights, this workshop aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical landscape in this vital region of the world.

3. Context

This workshop not only builds on the GRM main foci, but even more it broadens its research horizon through the examination of an under-examined topic such as the inter-relations between state and non-state entities. This workshop considers cross-disciplinarity as a very important approach to looking at the GCC relations with federal Iraq. Therefore, the scope extends from International Relations, security, and foreign policy to energy, law, trade, and technological matters. The ontological innovation lies in the prism through which the agency is being perceived, which considers how actors other than the states can exist in interaction with the latter.

The workshop stands as a unique platform where in-depth analysis and rigorous discussions converge to offer a profound understanding of the intricate relationships among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the federal government of Iraq. A central focus of our conversation will be the burgeoning political, economic, and social ties between the GCC and Iraq, encompassing not only the economic landscape but also

the complex social and political dynamics shaping this relationship. We will explore the nuances of these ties, emphasizing the collaborative efforts that extend beyond mere economic partnerships. Our experts will delve into the vital area of security sector cooperation, examining the shared challenges faced by GCC nations, Kurdish, and federal Iraqi authorities. Through comprehensive analysis, we will evaluate the joint endeavors aimed at combatting pressing cross-border issues such as environmental degradation, drug smuggling, and the movement of non-state actors. This scrutiny will extend to examining existing mechanisms, highlighting successes achieved, and identifying areas necessitating further cooperation and improvement. Investments in technological advancements and social innovations will be explored as pivotal avenues for enhancing cooperation and addressing evolving security challenges.

Additionally, the workshop will thoroughly investigate the impact of Iraq's bilateral relations with Syria, Turkey, and Iran on the delicate balance of power between the KRG and Baghdad. By dissecting the intricacies of these relationships, participants will gain valuable insights into how these ties affect the leverage of the KRG in its negotiations and interactions with the federal government. Moreover, the discussion will emphasize the potential of the KRG to nurture independent economic, social, and political ties with Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Assessing the opportunities and challenges presented by these relationships, attendees will brainstorm innovative strategies to bolster the KRG's autonomy, fostering robust partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Through a nuanced analysis, our contributors will shed light on the significant influence exerted by entities such as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in both federal Iraq and contested territories. We will explore how the presence and leverage of these groups have shaped the threat perceptions of GCC countries, providing essential context to the evolving geopolitical landscape of the GCC within the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. Furthermore, foreign policy's impact on regional politics will be examined, elucidating the multifaceted dimensions that influence diplomatic decisions and strategic alliances. Equally vital to our discussions will be the exploration of the roles of energy, trade, and law, recognizing their indispensable role in fostering inter-regional relations. Shared experiences in these areas will be analyzed as potential catalysts for deeper collaboration.

In conclusion, this workshop serves as a comprehensive exploration of the regional and international aspects of the subject matter under scrutiny. By dissecting these complex relationships and delving into the geopolitical intricacies, the workshop aims to provide a holistic understanding of the evolving dynamics among the GCC, the KRG, and the federal government of Iraq, ultimately fostering informed dialogue and facilitating mutually beneficial collaborations in the region.

4. Focus/objectives

There is a dearth in the literature as far as this topic is concerned. This is the case not only for the KRG- GCC relations, but even further with the role of Iraq in the GCC foreign policy and vice-versa. Besides, Iraq as one of the key actors in the heart of the Middle East raises particularly interest for neighbouring states like Iran. Therefore, the workshop engages with the triangle GCC – Iraq – KR as an under-examined subject matter. This is particularly interesting in a federal context where both Baghdad and Erbil can develop parallel foreign policies with the Arab Gulf States. The implications of such interactions for the formulation of regional politics are of great importance when looking for instance at the UAE-KRI as a working model with interesting implications. Accordingly, and in relation to the current complex international and regional dynamics, including issues such as the changing geopolitical scenery followed by surprising events; the examination of this theme appears critical. More specifically, this workshop represents a significant expansion of the Gulf Research Meeting's main foci by delving into an under-examined and crucial topic: the

inter-relations between state and non-state entities within the context of the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) relations with federal Iraq. Unlike traditional analyses, this workshop adopts a cross-disciplinary approach, recognizing the complexity of these relationships and the need to explore various dimensions comprehensively. By embracing a holistic perspective that transcends old-fashioned categories and artificial boundaries, we aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interactions shaping the geopolitical landscape of the region.

Organizing a multidisciplinary workshop that looks beyond traditional divisions and explores the interconnected socio-political fields of the economy, security, diplomacy, environment, and technological innovations offers several analytical advantages. This approach enables us to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex issues by considering various factors that influence each other, fostering a more holistic problem-solving methodology. Moreover, by examining the intersections between these fields, we can identify hidden connections and interdependencies, unveiling new avenues for research and policy development.

By recognizing the inherent interlinkages between diverse fields and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, this workshop aims to enrich scholarly discourse, foster innovative thinking, and pave the way for informed policymaking and diplomatic initiatives in the region. Through this innovative and comprehensive approach, we endeavour to contribute significantly to the understanding of the intricate dynamics among the GCC, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the federal government of Iraq, fostering a more interconnected, holistic, and effective approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities in the region.

Finally, our workshop, which is expected to make an original contribution to the field of Gulf Studies considers both structures and agents of different kinds. The growing implication of such inter-relations between state and non-state actor-hood bears both theoretical and empirical importance that needs to be further analyzed. Further, this interdisciplinary perspective allows for the generation of nuanced insights into how economic, security, diplomatic, environmental, and technological factors interact and influence one another. It promotes innovation and creativity by encouraging collaboration across disciplines, leading to novel approaches and out-of-the-box solutions to complex issues. Additionally, policies informed by insights from diverse fields are more likely to be comprehensive, responsive to real-world complexities, and adaptable to changing circumstances, enhancing the effectiveness of policy formulation.

5. Papers focus/topics

- GCC - KRI relations: Diplomacy and foreign policy
- GCC- Iraq relations: A Rapprochement
- The impact of the conflict in Gaza on GCC relations with Iraq's federal government and the KRG
- The Role of Turkey in the dynamics between Iraq's federal government and the KRG
- Perspectives on Syria and the potential for improving coordination between the GCC, the KRG, and Iraq's federal government
- Iran's regional influence and its implications for GCC's relations with the KRG and Iraq's federal government

Further aspects of this triangular GCC/KR/Iraq inter-relation are:

- Religious diplomacy and strategic considerations
- The role of energy

- Environmental sustainability and climate change policies
- Security parameters and the role of non-state actors
- Trade and agriculture as tools of foreign policymaking
- (Non)Implementation of international law: Comparative case studies
- Cybersecurity and terrorism

Paper proposals should fit as closely as possible with this workshop description, notably section 4, and the publication plans (section 7).

6. Paper structure, referencing, and format

Please make sure that the submitted paper is clearly structured and is as close to being ready for publication as possible.

Authors should also adhere to the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#).

Participants who do not submit a paper by the 31 May 2024 deadline or whose submitted paper does not meet the requirements will be disinvited by GRCC.

7. Publication plans

The publication plan:

- We intend to publish many or most of the workshop papers in a special issue or
- Prepare a book proposal for a monograph on this topic or
- Consider a complimentary policy-orientated publication with a leading think tank

Papers that may not be publishable in the edited volume/special issue of a journal will still be reviewed by the directors and considered for individual publication in either a peer-reviewed journal or as a GRC paper. Directors will make reasonable efforts to ensure that all accepted papers are published in one of these forms.

8. References

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Cengiz, S. (2022). “Dynamics of Saudi Arabia–KRG Relations: From 2003 Iraq War to 2017 Referendum and Beyond.” *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*. Vol.9. Issue 3.

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Dr Umud Shokri. “Strengthening Energy Security: The GCC-Iraq Electrical Interconnection Project.” *Gulf International Forum* in <https://gulrif.org/strengthening-energy-security-the-gcc-iraq-electrical-interconnection-project/>.

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9. Directors' bio notes

Dr. Marianna Charountaki is Senior Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Lincoln, School of Social and Political Sciences. She has acted as Director of the Kurdistan International Studies Unit (2016-2019) at the University of Leicester. She is a BRISMES and BISA trustee and co-convener of the BISA Foreign Policy Working Group. She is also a Research Fellow at Soran University (Erbil, Iraq). She has worked as a consultant at the Iraqi Embassy in Athens (Greece, 2011-2012). Marianna has been researching the Middle Eastern region, in light of the IR discipline, but also through extensive fieldwork research (2007 to present). Her research lies at the intersection of IR theories, foreign policy analysis, and area studies with an emphasis on the interplay between state and non-state entities as well as the latter's conceptualization and foreign policy standing. She is the author of the monographs *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*, (Routledge, 2011) and *Iran and Turkey: International and Regional Engagement in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2018) and co-author of *Mapping Non-State Actors in International Relations* (Springer, 2022). She has published articles in *Harvard International Review*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *International Politics Journal*, *Third World Quarterly*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, and others.

Dr. Inna Rudolf is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) and a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Divided Societies. Within the XCEPT consortium, she is analyzing the implications of identity politics and the mobilization of violent memories in conflict-affected borderlands. As part of her Ph.D. thesis at the War Studies Department of King's College London, Rudolf focused on the hybridization of security sector governance, examining Iraq's paramilitary umbrella – the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) - and their quest for legitimacy within the state. She received her master's degree in political science and Islamic studies in 2012 at the University of Heidelberg, specializing in Conflict Resolution, Peace Building, and Political Islam. In addition to her fieldwork in Iraq, she lived in Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine for several years.