



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

## **14<sup>th</sup> Gulf Research Meeting**

**Cambridge, 9-11 July 2024**

### **Workshop No. 13**

## **The Politics and Policy of Climate Change in the Gulf**

### **1. Directors**

#### **Dr. Aisha Al-Sarihi**

Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, Non-Resident Fellow at Middle East Council on Global Affairs and The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, D.C., USA

#### **Professor Michael Mason**

Professor of Environmental Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science

### **2. Abstract**

Aware of the volatility of the oil market, and the looming global energy transition where the production and consumption of fossil fuels is reduced, the Gulf countries have put efforts into diversifying their economies whilst at the same time making long-term climate mitigation goals, including commitments to net zero carbon emissions. Most of the economic diversification efforts however remain heavily reliant on oil rent. With intensifying climate impacts, Gulf countries are also having to incorporate climate adaptation measures into their political economic models.

This workshop aims to explore the interlinkages between economic diversification efforts and climate change implications in the region. The workshop also aims to examine whether hydrocarbons play a role in determining the trajectory of climate policies and governance in the region, taking into consideration the interplay between climate change and economic, social, cultural and political developments. The main focus of the discussion is to:

- Assess the various policy challenges presented by climate change including water scarcity and security, food security, extreme weather events, and possible pathways to address these challenges in a post-oil era.
- Discuss the interplay between climate change and economic, social, cultural, and political developments.

- Examine the socio-economic and geopolitical implications of climate change as well as the implications of policies and measures implemented to address them.
- Examine the role of non-state actors, such as the private and financial sectors, in addressing climate change in the Gulf.

### **3. Context**

Climate change poses a significant challenge for countries around the world. The latest IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report suggests that implementing current climate policies will result in projected emissions that lead to warming of 3.2°C, with a range of 2.2°C to 3.5°C (medium confidence). Most recently, the UNFCCC Synthesis Report of the Technical Dialogue of the first Global Stocktake, released in September 2023, ahead of COP28 highlighted how global temperatures will rise by 2.4-2.6°C by the end of the century based on current national climate action plans, and called for phasing out unabated fossil fuels if we are to keep the global temperature below 1.5°C within reach. The Gulf countries – the six Arab Gulf states, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as well as Iran and Iraq, historically known for oil and gas, are increasingly confronted with the environmental, economic and political challenges of climate change. With an already hot, arid, and semi-arid climate, the region is heating up at double the rate of the rest of the world, and already struggling with water scarcity, food security, sea level rise and increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events especially sandstorms and tropical cyclones. Climate change is also becoming a core driver for geopolitical tensions and insecurity, widening the disparities between resource rich and poor countries in the region. The dilemma faced by the Gulf countries is how to prepare for an oil-free future in a context in which hydrocarbon wealth has made them some of the world's wealthiest nations (in per capita terms) in just a few decades and supported a social contract necessary for continuing regime legitimacy. This oil wealth has also helped the Gulf nations to adapt to the severe impacts of climate change including through food imports and the deployment of cooling and water desalination technologies. Aware of the volatility of the oil market, and the looming global energy transition where the production and consumption of fossil fuels is reduced, with an anticipated decline in hydrocarbon revenues, the Gulf countries have put efforts into diversifying their economies and developing alternative sources of income including through the expansion of hydrocarbon downstream industries, investments in alternative energy resources such as renewables and hydrogen, tourism, space, sports, ports and logistics, mega-projects, and knowledge-based economy. Most of the economic diversification efforts however remain heavily reliant on oil rent. Without oil revenues, and with intensifying climate challenges, the future of the Gulf economies is threatened, posing significant socio-economic and political costs. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the interlinkages between efforts to address climate change and the region's strategic interest in fossil fuels.

### **4. Focus/objectives**

The main focus of this workshop is to discuss the Gulf region's climate policy and politics in light of its strategic interest in fossil fuels, and possible interaction between economic diversification efforts and climate change. Global climate change policy – particularly current and planned mitigation actions – is challenging the region's strategic interest in fossil fuel production. Globally the Gulf countries are disproportionate producers and exporters of

fossil fuels: in 2020, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar and Oman accounted for 31% of global oil production and 17% of global natural gas production, with 48% of proven world oil reserves and 40% of proven natural gas reserves (BP, 2021). Domestically, they face a double challenge of high GHG emissions per capita and emissions growth. Despite long-term commitments by Gulf states to net zero carbon emissions, key countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait) are increasing oil production capacity within the next five years. The workshop will critically examine how their political economic structures (conventionally characterised as rentier and dependent on hydrocarbons), shape the trajectory of climate policies and practices in the region, and vice versa. Is there political and economic space for the Gulf states to transition into a sustainable and climate resilient economic future? The specific objectives of the workshop are to:

- Assess the various challenges presented by climate change including water scarcity and security, food security, extreme weather events, and possible pathways to address these challenges in the post-oil era.
- Examine the implications of climate change on Gulf economic diversification and measures implemented to address them.
- Discuss the interplay between climate change and economic, social, cultural, and political developments.
- Examine the geopolitical implications of climate change as well as the policies and measures implemented to address them.
- Assess the role of non-state actors, such as the private and financial sectors, in addressing climate change in the Gulf.

## **5. Papers focus/topics**

The main focus of this workshop is to discuss the Gulf region's climate policy and politics in light of its strategic interest in fossil fuels and examine the interlinkages between climate change and economic diversification. Authors are invited to submit articles on the following topics:

- Climate change and economic diversification
- The geopolitics of energy transition in the Gulf
- The socio-economic and geopolitical implications of climate change
- The implications of climate response measures on Gulf economies
- Climate finance in the Gulf region
- Food security, climate, and conflict
- The nexus of climate change and water security in the Gulf region
- Climate-resilient developments such as urbanism and infrastructure
- Climatic disasters and development
- The interplay between climate change and economic, social, cultural, and political developments
- Non-state actors, such as the private and financial sectors, and climate action in the Gulf

Papers should focus on one of the topics indicated in this section, keeping in mind the indications in sections 4, 6, and 7.

## 6. Paper structure, referencing, and format

The planned publisher, Tauris/Bloomsbury, has editorial guidance on structure, format and referencing and we would ensure that these rules are communicated to the authors and used by them. The chapter contributions to the volume would be 8,000-9,000 words and follow the Harvard (author–date) referencing convention. There would be a single, collective set of references at the end of the volume, and a minimal use of endnotes.

Authors should also adhere to the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#) (except for the number of words).

The deadline for abstract submission is 31 December 2023. The selection of papers will be finalized by mid January 2024. Successful applicants will have until 31 May 2024 to submit a full paper in line with the accepted abstract. Participants who do not submit a completed paper by the 31 May 2024 deadline or whose submitted paper is not in line with the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#) will be disinvited from GRM.

## 7. Publication plans

We intend to publish a volume from the workshop with the most suitable papers. Prospective workshop participants are encouraged to submit papers on the topics that fall into the four parts. The specific topics may diverge from the ones indicated below.

Book title: The Politics and Policy of Climate Change in the GCC

Part I: GCC Energy Transition

- From Grey to Green? Navigating the Geopolitics of the Energy Transition in the GCC

Part II: GCC Climate Finance

- Climate Finance in the GCC Region: Current State and Possible ways Forward

Part III: GCC Food-Water-Energy Nexus

- Food Security, Climate and Conflict – Where does the GCC Region Stand?
- The Nexus of Climate Change and Water Security in the GCC

Part IV: GCC Infrastructure and Development

- GCC Climate Urbanism
- Climate-Proofing for Development: The Impact of Climatic Disasters on the GCC Education System

Papers that may not be publishable in the edited volume will still be reviewed by the directors and considered for: (i) a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal, and for all remaining papers (ii) an article in a peer-reviewed journal, or (iii) GRC paper. Directors will make reasonable efforts to ensure that all accepted papers are published in one of these three forms.

## 8. References

BP (2021). bp statistical review of world energy 2021. BP plc.

IPCC (2023). AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023

Kamrava, M. (2012). The political economy of the Persian Gulf. Hurst.

Kozhanov, Nikolay, Karen Young, Jalal Qanas (2023). GCC Hydrocarbon Economies and COVID- Old Trends, New Realities. Palgrave Macmillan Singapore.

Krane, Jim (2019). Energy Kingdoms: Oil and Political Survival in the Persian Gulf. Columbia University Press.

Mills, Robin, Li-Chen Sim (2021). Low Carbon Energy in the Middle East and North Africa. Palgrave Macmillan Cham. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59554-8>

Raouf, Mohamed Abdel and Mari Luomi (2016). The Green Economy in the Gulf. Routledge Tyler & Francis Group.

UNFCCC (2023). Technical dialogue of the first global stocktake. Synthesis report by the co-facilitators on the technical dialogue. FCCC/SB/2023/9

Wehrey, Frederic et al. (2023). Climate Change and Vulnerability in the Middle East. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Wolff, Katherine and Karen E. Young (2024). Energy Transitions in the Middle East- Challenges and Opportunities. Bloomsbury.

Zumbraegel, Tobias (2022). Political Power and Environmental Sustainability in Gulf Monarchies. Palgrave Macmillan.

## 9. Directors' bio notes

**Dr. Aisha Al-Sarihi** is a research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute. She is also an associate fellow of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House, a nonresident fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs and the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, D.C.. Her areas of research include political economy, geopolitics, policy and governance of energy, climate, and environment, with a focus on the Arab region. Previously, Al-Sarihi was a research associate at King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center and a visiting scholar at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, D.C. She served as a research officer at the London School of Economics and Political Science's Middle East Centre. She authored several publications, including articles in *Renewable Energy* and the *Climate Policy* journal. Her research has been featured in different international media outlets including Reuters, Associated Press, Arab News, and Asia Times, among many others.

**Professor Michael Mason** is Director of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where he is also Professor of Environmental Geography in the Department of Geography and Environment, and an Associate of the Grantham Research Institute for Climate Change and the Environment. He is interested in ecological politics and governance as applied to questions of accountability, security, and sovereignty. His research addresses both global environmental politics and regional environmental change in Western Asia/the Middle East. Alongside articles in a wide range of academic journals, he is the author of *Environmental Democracy: A Contextual Approach* (Routledge, 1999) and *The New Accountability: Environmental Responsibility across Borders* (Routledge, 2005). He is also co-editor (with Amit Mor) of *Renewable Energy in the Middle East* (Springer, 2009), (with Aarti Gupta) *Transparency in Global Environmental Governance* (MIT Press, 2014), and (with Muna Dajani and Munir Fagher Eldin) *The Untold Story of the Golan Heights: Occupation, Colonization and Jawlani Resistance* (Bloomsbury, 2023). Alongside his academic research, he has advised governments and international organisations on climate and environmental policy, including the European Commission, NATO, the Palestinian Authority, the UK Government and UNDP.