



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

The 2010 Gulf Research Meeting

July 7 – 10, 2010
University of Cambridge

Workshop 1

Natural Resources, Accountability and Democracy

Workshop Directors

Prof. Gerd Nonneman

Professor of International Relations
University of Exeter (UK)
Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies
Stocker Road
University of Exeter
Exeter
UK

Dr Richard Youngs

Coordinator
Democratisation programme
FRIDE University
Calle Goya 5-7,
Pasaje 2º 28001
Madrid
Spain

Abstract

This workshop aims to re-examine both the generic linkages between natural resources and 'democratisation', and the specific case of the oil exporting states of the Gulf – using the latter to throw light on the former. This is important for at least three reasons: (1) very little notice has been taken of Middle Eastern, and especially Gulf, case studies, in the broader literature on the subject; (2) the region has long presented a peculiar case, with exceptional resources combined with apparently exceptional resilience of traditional systems; and, not least, (3) these economies are arguably undergoing a slow evolution beyond pure rentierism, while possible emerging new socio-political trends may be in part linked to this. Both empirically and conceptually, then, a significant contribution remains to be made.

The literature on the link between resources and democracy is both wide and diverse, and contested. It ranges from suggested links between wealth and democracy, to the opposite suggestion in early rentierism literature on the Middle East where rentierism was claimed to be a key factor in explaining the absence of political participation at the same time as the survival of regimes¹ Oil wealth in particular, and natural resource wealth more generally, have been

¹ See e.g. Beblawi, H. & Luciani, G, (eds.), *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

argued, for instance by Terry Karl, to almost inexorably lead to authoritarian / autocratic government, or at least to be negatively correlated with 'democracy', 'democratisation', or more broadly, political participation and accountability.²

The nature of such links, the mechanisms explaining them, and the variables that support them, intervene, or cut across them, remain incompletely understood. So does the extent to which hydrocarbon-based rentierism itself remains an adequate description of the GCC economies, and even more so of their *political* economies. Some recent work on the GCC economies has suggested that fledging shifts are indeed occurring that are changing the nature of at least parts of these economies.³ At the same time, some recent work on these countries' political evolution has raised the question whether they need always remain stuck in the 'liberalised autocracy' stage at best, or might have medium or longer term possibilities of moving beyond this.⁴ Even in the current phase of more or less liberalising autocracy, does the evidence from the GCC force us to re-visit Karl's view?

Workshop Description and Rationale

This workshop sets out to re-examine the linkages between natural resources – and in particular hydrocarbon fuel resources – and political liberalization/democratization, as illustrated by the case of the Gulf States. Very little notice has been taken of Middle Eastern, and especially Gulf, case studies in the broader literature on the subject. The region has long presented a peculiar case, with exceptional resources combining with apparently exceptional resilience of traditional systems. Moreover, these economies are arguably undergoing a slow evolution beyond pure rentierism, while possible emerging new socio-political trends may be in part linked to this. The workshop aims to make both an empirical and conceptual contribution to these questions.

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Richard Youngs is director general of FRIDE. He is also assistant professor at the University of Warwick in the UK. Prior to joining FRIDE, he was EU Marie Curie research fellow at the Norwegian Institute for International Relations, Oslo (2001-4), and senior research fellow at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (1995-8). He has a PhD and an MA in International Studies from the University of Warwick and a BA in Social and Political Science from the University of Cambridge. His research focuses mainly on democracy promotion and democratisation, European foreign policy, energy security, and the MENA region. He has written several books on different elements of European external policy and

² Terry L. Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (University of California Press, 1997); Terry L. Karl, 'Oil-Led Development: Social, Political, and Economic Consequences', CDDRL Working Paper, no. 80 (Stanford University, 2007) (http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/21537/No_80_Terry_Karl_-_Effects_of_Oil_Development.pdf); Michael Ross, 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?', *World Politics*, 53 (April 2001), pp. 325–61.

³ Steffen Hertog, 'Lean and Mean', paper presented to the Workshop on *Industrialization in the Gulf*, Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 27-28 March 2008; Giacomo Luciani, 'From Private Sector to National Bourgeoisie', in Paul Aarts & Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance* (Hurst, 2005) pp. 144-181.

⁴ Gerd Nonneman, 'Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies – From Liberalisation to Democratisation? A Comparative Perspective', in A. Ehteshami & S. Wright, *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2007), pp. 3-46.

published over forty articles and working papers, while writing regularly in national and international media.

Prof. Gerd Nonneman was born in Flanders and educated at Ghent University (Belgium) in Oriental Philology (Arabic) and, at postgraduate level, in Development Studies. Professor Nonneman subsequently worked in the commercial sector in Iraq for a number of years during the 1980s, before returning to academia and further studies - including a doctorate in Middle East Politics at Exeter University. After teaching Middle East politics and political economy at Manchester and Exeter Universities, and a spell as Visiting Professor at the International University of Japan, he taught International Relations and Middle East Politics at Lancaster University from 1993 to 2007, returning to Exeter, in the summer of 2007 to take up his present position as Al-Qasimi Professor of Gulf Studies. He was a member of the UK's 2001 national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) panel on Middle Eastern Studies, and served as Executive Director of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), 1998-2002. He is also an associate Fellow of the Middle East Programme at Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs), serving as the Programme's specialist on the Arab Gulf states. Alongside his academic work, Prof. Nonneman has written for specialist political and economic analysis publications such as the Economist Intelligence Unit and acted as a consultant to or worked with a range of companies, national and international official institutions including the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, foreign ministries in Europe and elsewhere, the European Commission, and various NGOs - ranging from Amnesty International to the Bertelsmann Foundation.