



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 8

An Assessment of Opportunities and Possibilities: The Gulf and Latin America

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Abstract

This workshop aims to explore the types of links that some Latin American countries have forged with their counterparts in the Gulf, especially the connections since the nineties, when the importance of Latin America started increasing for some Gulf countries. Some Latin American countries are important in terms of being oil producers, others because of their role directly or indirectly in the major crises of the Middle East, and yet others because of their commercial exchanges with some Middle East countries. Among those Latin American countries that have built up connections with the Gulf are Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. The interest of countries such as Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), among others, as well as the 2005 Arab-South America Summit has strengthened the exchanges between the two regions. Looking at the nature of the relationships between Latin America and the Gulf, their shifts and continuities, as well as their scope will enable an assessment of the possibilities of the relationships and their weight in the dynamics of the two regions.

Description and Rationale

The study of external actors' role in the Middle East and particularly in the Gulf has generally been focused on the patterns of the relationship that have evolved between Middle Eastern states and countries from the North (developed countries), namely the

United States and Europe. Towards the end of the Cold War, new political and economic patterns appeared. For example, the issue of regionalism became more pronounced across the globe and new emerging powers, like China and Russia, started to become closer to these regions due to interests related to commercial exchange and political attempts to counterbalance US influence.

Amid these new trends, bilateral and multilateral exchanges between the two regions increased, covering a wide range of issues. It was not until 2005, when the first Arab-South America Summit was held, that attempts at governmental and non-governmental levels to promote relations emerged and a number of agreements were signed envisaging the systematic development of a relationship. Despite the new dynamics, the exchange between these two regions is often neglected, or at least not included in the analysis of Gulf or Latin American foreign relations; in contrast, there is a growing literature about China and/or South Asian countries' exchanges with these regions. Furthermore regarding foreign policy analysis, there is a lack of attention towards South-South cooperation and the possibilities of alliances among the countries either to strengthen their participation on the global agenda or to ameliorate the shifts of power balances at the international and regional level.

The specific goal of this workshop is to assess the viability of this new phase in the relationship between the two regions. For this reason, it is important to take into consideration the nature of the relationship, and the issues that foster closer ties and those that limit them. This will allow us to inquire into the durability of the ties already established between the Gulf and Latin America. Regarding the individual foreign policy of the countries, it is important to analyze the main features that are present in their formulation and look at the domestic factors that could influence foreign policy: the regime type, its changes and effects on policy orientation, the country's economic and political situation, and its capabilities and constraints. To better understand these regions, one has to examine the change of regimes that together with the economic and political conditions at internal and external levels, is transforming the orientation of some countries, especially in the case of Latin America. The liberalization process already established in some of the Gulf countries and the economic and political challenges also impinge on the course of their foreign relations.

The assessment has to be accompanied by an analysis of the influence of external actors, particularly the United States, on the dynamics of both regions. The degree of activism and autonomy that countries across the regions can display, some trying to either counterbalance or align towards United States, is in part a product of both domestic and external factors. In the case of Latin America, besides the historical background, the geopolitical factor also affects the way a country approaches the world. For that reason we need to notice how the geographical distance between US and Latin American countries influences the conduct of foreign policy beyond the region. From the Gulf side also, we can observe the diversity of links forged towards United States that influenced the margin of maneuver and the scope of the links that the Gulf countries establish.

This workshop aims to explore the types of links that Latin American countries have forged with their counterparts in the Gulf and vice-versa. We would like to have an analysis of the background of the relationships and then assess the connections that have been present

since the nineties, when Latin America's importance to some key Middle East states started growing, and vice versa. In this regard, some countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela present foreign policies that go beyond the 'Latin American' framework due to the features and interests of each country. Mexico and Venezuela have their connections to some Gulf countries as a result of their oil; besides, the four countries have played a role directly, or indirectly, in major Middle East crises, especially in the Gulf. Furthermore, they have forged commercial treaties with some of the region's countries, with Brazil taking a leading position. On the Gulf side, Arab countries have shown an interest in developing commercial relations. Besides, Iran is playing an increasing role in South America not only regarding commercial agreements but also in terms of multilateral policies. Therefore, economic, political and strategic factors impinging on the foreign policies of the two regions and the relations between the two regions should be the aspects on which the papers are focused.

Research Questions

- How significant are the relationships for the countries and regions?
- Do these relationships represent viable South-South cooperation or could it be only a phase due to conjunctural circumstances?
- Does this relationship help the countries of both regions to advance their interests or concerns at a global level?
- Does this relationship help the countries of both regions to ameliorate the shifts of power at regional and global levels?
- How important are the structural factors (economic and political factors, links to major powers, regional balance of power) on the foreign policy orientation of the countries and their approach to each other's regions?
- Is there an effect of this new rapprochement on relations with other important actors such as United States or China?
- Which interests sustain and could contribute to a long term rapprochement between both regions?

Anticipated Papers

- a) Strengthen the analysis of foreign policy of South countries
- b) Deepen the understanding about the possibilities and limitations of South-South cooperation
- c) Consolidate the value of a comparative perspective to enrich area studies, since crossing between cultural/geographical areas provides a useful insight to advance understanding
- d) Increase the awareness on the importance of the Gulf and Latin American relationship.

Workshop Director Profile

Dr. Alejandra Galindo Marines specializes in Middle East politics with a focus on the Gulf area. She is currently Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the

Universidad de Monterrey, México. Her areas of research interest include citizenship and gender, as well as international relations of the Arab Gulf. She has conducted field research on Saudi Arabia and Yemen on the topic of gender, in addition to studying the relationships of some Latin American countries, including Mexico towards the Middle East and particularly the Gulf region. Among her recent publications are: “La Diplomacia del petróleo: las relaciones China - Arabia Saudita” (*Estudios de Asia y África* XLV, 1) and “Mexico’s Elusive Foreign Policy towards the Middle East: Between Indifference and Engagement” (*Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, 3).

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