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Workshop No. 3

Securing the Future: The GCC States' Endeavors in

Defense Industry, Warfare Technologies and Policy

1. Directors

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2. Abstract

Building on substantial and longstanding investments in arms, many of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman are pursuing the construction of military-industrial complexes in line with the rationales of their ‘Visions’ strategies. They also reflect the expediencies of a rapidly shifting regional and international landscape, in particular, a period of recent escalation in the Gulf and renewed regional diplomacy, uncertain relations with the US, and growing security and defensive relations with Russia and China, coupled with a long-term aim of building greater state autonomy. This workshop explores GCC state military–industrial complexes, focusing on how new technologies might impact the status quo, and what the interaction is between these developing security and defensive pathways and other state, regional, and international security issues and relationships.

3. Context

During the last few decades, the armed forces of the GCC nations have undergone a transformative evolution. From humble origins and despite often facing human resource and intra-GCC cooperative challenges, they have metamorphosed into some of the region's most technologically advanced military entities. Modernization has been pivotal to this transformation. Procuring state-of-the-art equipment, many of the GCC states have been relentless in bolstering their military prowess. Within

the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have been some of the biggest spenders in this respect. According to data obtained from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) database, over the last two decades (2002-2022), Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular occupied the 3rd and the 5th positions in the top five list of the world's largest arms importers. Defense dynamics vis-à-vis the United States in an unstable regional environment, including the war in Yemen, have contributed to these leading arms import positions. Yet US military assistance programs, within the context of other internal monarchical security interests, are routinely queried for their ability to promote military efficiency and coordination. From the Khaleeji perspective, the drive of localization of the defense industry is multifaceted. Strategically, it ensures that the GCC nations maintain greater autonomy over their expanding defense capabilities, minimizing and/or helping to guarantee (in the case of Bahrain) external dependencies (especially on the US) whilst maximizing technology transfer and self-reliance, thus giving the GCC countries a boost to their overall state autonomy and decision making, national-defense level capacities and economic diversification prospects. When coupled with hedging, these moves may increase the political maneuverability space vis-a-vis externally imposed conditionality and unforeseen developments amid the diffusion of global power, including the return of the great power competition. Military-industrial complexes also serve to insure against further regional tensions and continued uncertainties but could also contribute to greater regional cooperation in specific areas. From an economic perspective, a robust indigenous defense industry can be a significant employer, fostering technological innovation and trickle-down technologies that could boost economic growth, as evident in the case of Israel and Turkey. The ramifications of these initiatives are profound, influencing not just the defense sector but also the broader socio-economic fabric, including rising nationalist sentiment.

4. Focus/objectives

The quest for the indigenization of defense industries among GCC countries is not merely a matter of economic or technological ambition. It strikes at the very heart of Gulf regional security, especially when considering future prospects. Relying heavily on defense imports, especially from Western nations, has presented both opportunities and vulnerabilities for the GCC states. On one hand, it provides them access to cutting-edge technology and capabilities. On the other, it exposes them to potential risks associated with geopolitical shifts, changes in foreign policies of supplier countries, and the unpredictability of international relations. By localizing their defense industries, GCC nations aim to reduce such dependencies, thereby enhancing their strategic autonomy and resilience. This move not only has implications for their defense and security postures but also for the broader geopolitics and international relations of the Gulf, as it could recalibrate alliances and power dynamics.

The topic matters also because the defense dynamics of the GCC countries have implications that ripple far beyond their borders, on several levels, including:

- a. Geopolitical Level: The GCC states, given their strategic location and vast energy reserves, have always been at the nexus of global geopolitics and geo-economics. Any shift in their defense posture or capabilities can influence the power dynamics in the region and beyond.
- b. Economic Level: The localization of the defense industry in the GCC sub-region can leave its impact not only on the economy of the meant nations but also on the global defense trade. It can reduce some trading relations, open up new markets, foster collaborations, and even introduce competition.

- c. Security Level: The localization of the defense industry can embolden some GCC state's armed forces. The integration of AI in the local defense industries, the defense doctrines/strategies, especially in areas like cybersecurity, hybrid warfare, and maritime security among others, can set precedents and leave various implications of different levels.
- d. Diplomatic Level: The GCC state's defense collaborations resulting from the localization of the defense industry can redefine diplomatic relations, dependencies/alliances, and other dynamics in the region and beyond.

5. Papers focus/topics

1. Evolution of the localization efforts in the Gulf:

This could include papers reviewing, contextualizing, assessing, and evaluating past and present efforts to build indigenous defense industries in several GCC countries, and anticipating further localizations efforts based on present assessments, including efforts to develop national autonomous systems, cybersecurity capabilities, robotics, and acquire or integrate AI in the defense and security realm.

2. The domestic aspect of the localization efforts:

Papers could assess the impact of localization efforts at the national level, including on:

- a. National security
- b. National defense strategies
- c. Military doctrines
- d. The performance of the national armed forces
- e. National defense budgets
- f. National economy

3. The foreign dimension of the localization efforts:

Impact of the localization efforts on:

- a. Foreign policy objectives of the GCC states.
- b. Diplomatic, economic, defense, military, or security relations with various regional and international actors, partners, allies, established or rising defense exporters, established or newcomers to Gulf security, such as the US, EU (France, England, Germany, Italy), Russia, China, Türkiye, India, Pakistan, and South Korea among others.

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

Special issue with a Q1 or Q2 journal. If cross-regional issues are raised, we will target strategic studies journals such as *Security Dialogue*, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *International Spectator*, or *Conflict, Security and Development*. For a narrower collection of state and regional studies, we will target Middle East Studies journals such as *Middle East Critique* or *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Alternatively, depending on the composition and interconnectivity of the papers, they may be submitted as an edited volume with a Gulf or Middle East-focused book series such as those with Lexington Books, Palgrave, MUP, or CUP.

Papers that may not be publishable in the special issue of a journal or edited volume 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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SIPRI, "Arms Trade," https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_toplist.php Bilal Saab, *Rebuilding Arab Defense: US Security Cooperation in the Middle East*. (Lynne Rienner, 2022).

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Zoltan Barany, *Indigenous Defense Industries in the Gulf*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 24 April 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indigenous-defense-industries-gulf>

9. Directors' bio notes

Dr. Robert Mason FHEA FRSA is a Non-Resident Fellow with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and a Senior Non-Resident Fellow with the Gulf Research Center in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Mason holds a Ph.D. in Middle East Politics from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. His thesis focused on the economic, geo-strategic, and ideological aspects of Saudi and Iranian foreign policy. He is the author or editor of nine books, including *Foreign Policy in Iran and Saudi Arabia: Economics and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (I. B. Tauris, 2014) and *Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates: Foreign Policy and Strategy in an Uncertain World*, (Manchester University Press, 2023). His work has also appeared in the *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *Third World Quarterly*, and *European Foreign*

Affairs Review. He also writes regularly for outlets such as the Atlantic Council, Stimson Center, Middle East Institute, Cairo Review of Global Affairs, and Middle East Council.

Dr. Ali Bakir is a Research Assistant Professor at Qatar University's Ibn Khaldon Center for Humanities and Social Sciences. He is also a Non-Resident Senior Fellow with the "Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative" and Middle East programs at the Washington-based Atlantic Council. Bakir has over 15 years of professional experience working with senior officials, decision-makers, and stakeholders for governmental, non-governmental, and private-sector institutions. Before joining Qatar University, he was a senior adviser at Qatar's Embassy in Ankara.