



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

GULF RESEARCH MEETING

16th Gulf Research Meeting

21-23 July 2026 – University of Cambridge

Workshop No. 11

The GCC and Infrastructure Connectivity in the Changing Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Landscape

Workshop Schedule

Workshop Directors

Dr. Tim Niblock

Tsinghua University, University of Exeter

Dr. Degang Sun

Fudan University

Talmiz Ahmad

Symbiosis International University

First Workshop Day - Wednesday, 22 July 2026

08:15 - 08:30 – Welcome coffee and tea

08:30 - 09:00 – Introduction of Workshop and Participants

09:00 - 09:45 – Paper 1: The Gulf Cooperation Council as an Emerging Global Digital Corridor: Geo-Economic and Geopolitical Recalibration through Tech Connectivity

Presenters: Shivali Lawale & Talmiz Ahmad

Discussant: Erzsébet N. Rózsa

09:45 - 10:30 – Paper 2: Enhancing the GCC Digital Infrastructure Resilience, Preparedness and Crisis Management against the Hybrid Threats

Presenter: Juha Mäkelä

Discussant: Tingyi Wang

10:30 - 10:45 – Coffee and tea break

10:45 - 11:30 – Paper 3: From Silk Roads to Digital Corridors: Legal Dimensions of Infrastructure Interconnectivity in Asia, Indonesia and the Gulf

Presenters: Mas Rahmah & Muhammad Nabil

Discussant: Dr. Zeynab Farhadi

11:30 - 12:15 – Paper 4: AI Infrastructure Race in GCC States: Navigating great-powers competition and strategic autonomy

Presenters: Zhiqiang Zou and Xiaoyu Wang

Discussant: Shavkat Ikromov

12:15 - 13:00 – Paper 5: Institutional Hedging by GCC States between Washington and Beijing

Presenter: Gafar Karar Ahmed

Discussant: Degang Sun

13:00 - 15:00 – Lunch break (lunch served at King’s College)

**15:00 - 15:45 – Paper 6: Navigating Great Power Competition in Infrastructure Financing:
The Future of Regional Connectivity in the Gulf**

Presenters: Monalisa Dash & Asif Haseen

Discussant: Irfan Al Hasani

**15:45 - 16:30 – Paper 7: Infrastructure, Finance, and the Making of Gulf Regional
Integration**

Presenter: Yuan Zhang

Discussant: Ayesha Alketbi

16:30 - 16:45 – Coffee and tea

**16:45 - 17:30 – Paper 8: China’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Persian Gulf: Strategic
Implications for Regional Order, Security Architectures, and Geopolitical Balance**

Presenter: Dr. Zeynab Farhadi

Discussant: Mas Rahmah

**17:30 - 18:15 – Paper 9: China’s Seaport Investments along the Maritime Silk Road:
Shaping a New Narrative for Infrastructure Interconnectivity**

Presenter: Degang Sun

Discussant: Gafar Karar Ahmed

End of First Workshop Day

Evening Free

Second Workshop Day - Thursday, 23 July 2026

08:45 - 09:00 – Welcome coffee and tea

09:00 - 09:45 – Paper 10: GCC–Asia–Europe Connectivity Patterns in the Context of Emerging Trade Corridors

Presenter: Vilen Mnatsakanyan

Discussant: Behar Sadriu

09:45 - 10:30 – Paper 11: Recognizing Public–Private Partnerships as a Critical Paradigm for Enhancing Infrastructure Connectivity across GCC Member States

Presenter: Irfan Al Hasani

Discussant: Monalisa Dash

10:30 - 11:15 – Paper 12: Succession in Family-Owned Holding Companies and Its Impact on Infrastructure Connectivity Sustainability in the GCC amid Geoeconomic Transformations

Presenter: Ayesha Alketbi

Discussant: Yuan Zhang

11:15 - 11:30 – Coffee and tea break

11:30 - 12:15 – Paper 13: “Resistance connectivity” – Iran’s assets and liabilities in the 21st century “great game”

Presenter: Erzsébet N. Rózsa

Discussant: Talmiz Ahmad

12:15 - 13:00 – Paper 14: The Gulf as a Strategic Juncture: How Middle Powers Navigate Competitive Economic Corridors (Draft)

Presenters: Tingyi Wang & Jin Wang

Discussant: Juha Mäkelä

13:00 - 14:15 – Lunch break (lunch is served at the workshop venue)

14:15 - 15:00 – Paper 15: GCC Geoeconomics and the Balkans: Strategic Competition, Connectivity, and Cooperation in the Adriatic Gateway

Presenter: Behar Sadriu

Discussant: Vilen Mnatsakanyan

15:00 - 15:45 – Paper 16: Strategic Significance of Energy and Infrastructure Cooperation between the GCC and Central Asia

Presenter: Shavkat Ikromov

Discussant: İlbey Çoban

15:45 - 16:00 – Coffee and tea

16:00 - 16:45 – Paper 17: Türkiye’s Role in NATO’s 360-Degree Security Approach and Its Role in Middle East-Gulf Interconnectivity

Presenters: Hüseyin Bağcı & M. İlbey Çoban

Discussant: Zhiqiang Zou

16:45 - 17:15 - Publication discussion and questionnaire

End of Second and Final Workshop Day

19:00 Farewell Dinner at King’s College