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Workshop No. 5

Yemen at the Gulf's Crossroads: State Fragmentation, Regional Order, Peacebuilding, and the Future of Gulf-Yemen Relations

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2. Abstract

Yemen occupies a pivotal strategic position at the intersection of Gulf regional politics, Red Sea security, state transformation, and international efforts to address protracted conflict. Its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia and Oman, its location along the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and its longstanding historical, social, economic, and political connections with Gulf societies make Yemen more than an external security concern for Gulf states. It is also a critical arena where regional relationships, security arrangements, and political order are negotiated and contested.

This workshop examines Yemen as a critical case for understanding the evolving relationship between state fragmentation and Gulf regional politics. Moving beyond approaches that treat the Yemeni conflict primarily as a domestic crisis or a bilateral security challenge, it explores the reciprocal ways in which Yemen's changing political order interacts with the interests, policies, and strategic calculations of Gulf states. It considers how regional engagement affects political authority and institutional structures in Yemen, while also examining how developments within Yemen influence the security and political environment of the Gulf.

The workshop examines issues of state fragmentation, regional and maritime security, political settlements, peacebuilding, political economy, migration, economic connectivity, and inclusive

governance. It pays particular attention to the evolving regional diplomacy of Saudi Arabia, Oman's mediation efforts, and Gulf economic transformation agendas, including Saudi Vision 2030 and emerging regional connectivity initiatives. It also examines the relationship between fragmented political authority and regional engagement; the implications of Yemen's political settlement for Gulf security; economic interdependence, reconstruction, and labour mobility; and the contributions of women, civil society, and local actors to inclusive peacebuilding.

By bringing Yemen more centrally into Gulf Studies, the workshop seeks to generate theoretically informed and policy-relevant research on the interaction between fragmented states and regional powers. It aims to advance understanding of how this interaction shapes prospects for political settlement, institutional recovery, economic cooperation, and sustainable peace, while considering the implications of Yemen's future for the wider Gulf regional order.

3. Context

Yemen represents a consequential case for understanding the intersection of Gulf and wider Middle Eastern politics. Its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia and Oman, its position adjacent to the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, and its longstanding social, economic, and political connections with Gulf societies have made developments within Yemen directly relevant to Gulf security and regional stability. However, Gulf–Yemen relations extend well beyond conventional interstate security considerations. Cross-border communities, labour mobility, migration, trade, remittances, humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, political networks, and shared security concerns have produced dense and multidimensional relationships between Yemen and its Gulf neighbours. These relationships have evolved alongside profound transformations in Yemen's political order, particularly the erosion of central state institutions and the emergence of competing centres of political and territorial authority.

The developments following the 2011 uprising and the subsequent political transition further transformed this relationship. Institutional fragmentation, armed conflict, competing claims to political legitimacy, and the emergence of de facto authorities created a complex environment in which Gulf states have had to navigate overlapping security, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical interests. Consequently, Gulf–Yemen relations can no longer be adequately understood through conventional approaches centred exclusively on foreign policy or interstate rivalry. They require closer examination of the interaction between domestic political transformations in Yemen and the evolving priorities and strategies of regional actors.

The Yemeni conflict also raises broader theoretical questions about the relationship between fragmented states and regional powers. Regional engagement may emerge in response to domestic political fragmentation, but it can also interact with and reshape the institutional structures through which political authority is exercised. External involvement, therefore, is not simply a response to internal conflict; it may also influence the distribution of political power, the functioning of state institutions, and the prospects for political settlement. Understanding this reciprocal relationship is essential to analysing both Yemen's political trajectory and the changing configuration of Gulf regional order.

At the same time, the limitations of approaches centred primarily on military confrontation and elite-level bargaining have become increasingly apparent. A sustainable political settlement in Yemen will require more than agreements among major political and armed actors. It will also depend on viable institutional arrangements, effective local governance, economic recovery, social cohesion, and meaningful participation by women and civil society. These dimensions are closely connected to the interests and future engagement of Gulf states, whose relationship

with Yemen is likely to involve not only conflict management but also questions of governance, reconstruction, economic cooperation, and regional security.

Yemen's strategic significance has also become increasingly visible through developments in the Red Sea and around the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Maritime insecurity has highlighted the interconnected nature of Gulf, Red Sea, and international security systems, raising important questions about collective security arrangements, the protection of commercial shipping, trade routes, and responses to transnational threats. In parallel, transformations in Gulf foreign policy and economic development strategies have reinforced the importance of examining Yemen within broader regional planning and connectivity frameworks. Saudi Vision 2030, regional logistics corridors, energy infrastructure initiatives, and emerging Gulf–Red Sea economic linkages provide grounds for investigating the opportunities and constraints associated with Yemen's potential participation in regional economic networks. Such questions require attention not only to economic integration and connectivity, but also to the political, institutional, and security conditions necessary for their development.

Against this background, the workshop approaches Yemen not as a peripheral case within Gulf Studies, but as an analytically significant setting for examining regional order, state transformation, and peacebuilding. It explores how Yemen's political fragmentation affects the Gulf, how Gulf policies and institutions influence Yemen's political and economic trajectories, and what forms of regional engagement could contribute to sustainable peace and institutional recovery. Its central premise is that the relationship is reciprocal: Yemen is shaped by the wider Gulf regional environment, while developments within Yemen, in turn, influence the security, political, economic, and institutional dynamics of the Gulf. Examining this relationship can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the future of Gulf–Yemen relations and the evolving regional order.

The workshop draws upon contemporary scholarship on state fragmentation, regional security complexes, and peacebuilding to analyse how domestic political transformations in Yemen interact with the evolving strategies, institutions, and security dynamics of the Gulf region.

4. Workshop Focus /Objectives

Gulf–Yemen relations extend well beyond conventional interstate security considerations. Cross-border communities, labour mobility, migration, trade, remittances, humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, political networks, and shared security concerns have created dense and multidimensional relationships between Yemen and its Gulf neighbours. These relationships have evolved alongside major transformations in Yemen's political order, particularly the erosion of central state institutions and the emergence of competing centres of political and territorial authority.

The workshop examines Yemen not merely as a conflict setting, but as an integral part of the evolving Gulf regional order. It brings together scholars and practitioners to explore how Yemen's fragmented political order interacts with the changing strategies and priorities of Gulf states, and how these interactions shape regional security, political settlement, economic relations, governance, and prospects for sustainable peace.

The central analytical question guiding the workshop is:

How does the interaction between Yemen's fragmented political order and the evolving strategies of Gulf states shape the prospects for regional security, political settlement, economic recovery, governance, and sustainable peace?

The workshop pursues five interconnected objectives:

1. To examine the implications of Yemen's political fragmentation for its relations with Gulf states, with particular attention to competing centres of authority, changing forms of sovereignty, border governance, regional diplomacy, and evolving relationships between Yemeni and Gulf actors.
2. To analyse Yemen's position within the changing Gulf and Red Sea security environment, including border security, maritime security, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, armed non-state actors, transnational security challenges, commercial shipping, and emerging regional security arrangements.
3. To assess the role of Gulf states in Yemen's political settlement and institutional reconstruction, focusing on mediation, regional diplomacy, decentralisation, power-sharing, political legitimacy, local governance, state reconstruction, and the relationship between national and subnational authorities.
4. To explore the economic and social relationships linking Yemen and the Gulf, including labour mobility, migration, remittances, trade, infrastructure, energy networks, humanitarian and development assistance, and reconstruction. This objective also examines the implications of Gulf economic transformation agendas, particularly Saudi Vision 2030, regional logistics corridors, investment opportunities, and emerging connectivity initiatives for Yemen's potential participation in regional economic networks and post-conflict recovery.
5. To examine inclusive approaches to peacebuilding and human security, with particular attention to women, youth, civil society, local peace initiatives, social cohesion, community resilience, and the potential contribution of Gulf institutions to more inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

Taken together, these objectives move the discussion beyond immediate conflict management towards a broader examination of the long-term political, economic, social, and security relationships linking Yemen and the Gulf. They also provide an integrated framework for understanding how developments within Yemen and the evolving strategies of Gulf states mutually shape the prospects for regional stability and sustainable peace.

5. Paper Focus/Topics

Suggested Research Topics and Proposed Paper Titles:

Theme 1: Yemen's Political Fragmentation and the Future of Gulf–Yemen Relations

1. Re-mapping Regional Proximity: Institutional Fragmentation and the Redefinition of Gulf–Yemeni Relations.
2. From Bilateral Diplomacy to Regional Engagement: Gulf States' Policies towards a Fragmented Yemen.
3. Sovereignty in Transition: Competing Authorities in Yemen and Their Implications for Gulf Regional Order.
4. The Evolution of Border Governance: Security, Mobility, and Cross-Border Dynamics between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Theme 2: Yemen and the Transformation of Gulf and Red Sea Security

5. Securing the Bab al-Mandab: Yemen's Domestic Conflict and the Transformation of Red Sea Maritime Security.
6. Beyond Deterrence: Missile, Drone, and Transnational Security Challenges in the Southern Arabian Peninsula.
7. Navigating Maritime Insecurity: Collective Security Arrangements and Commercial Shipping in the Red Sea.

8. Non-State Armed Actors, Regional Powers, and the Transformation of Security Strategies in the Gulf and Yemen.

Theme 3: Gulf States and the Political Settlement in Yemen

9. Mediation and Regional Diplomacy: Assessing Gulf Engagement in Yemen's Political Settlement.
10. The Role of GCC Institutions in Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Recovery.
11. Decentralisation, Power-Sharing, and State Reconstruction: Governance Options for a Post-Conflict Yemen.
12. The Dilemmas of External Intervention: Regional Powers and the Prospects for a Sustainable Political Settlement in Yemen.
13. Legitimacy, Political Authority, and Local Governance: Rebuilding State Institutions from the Local Level.
14. Economic Interests and Political Settlement in Yemen: The Role of Gulf States in Shaping Post-Conflict Arrangements.

Theme 4: Gulf–Yemen Economic Interdependence and Post-Conflict Recovery

15. Saudi Vision 2030 and Yemen: Opportunities for Economic Connectivity and Post-Conflict Recovery.
16. Regional Economic Integration between Yemen and the GCC: Opportunities and Constraints.
17. The Political Economy of Remittances and Labour Mobility in Gulf–Yemen Relations.
18. Reconstructing Infrastructure and Energy Networks: The Role of Gulf Development Cooperation in Yemen's Recovery.
19. Trade Corridors and Economic Connectivity: Linking Yemen to Emerging Gulf Economic Networks.
20. From Humanitarian Assistance to Sustainable Development: Rethinking External Financial Support and Institutional Recovery in Yemen.

Theme 5: Inclusive Peacebuilding, Civil Society, and Human Security

21. Women, Peace, and Security: Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives into Yemeni Peace Processes.
22. Local Peace Initiatives and Community Resilience: The Role of Civil Society in Fragmented Political Settings.
23. Youth, Employment, and Social Resilience: Building Foundations for Long-Term Stability in Yemen.
24. Inclusive Governance and Social Cohesion: Addressing Generational and Social Transformations in Post-Conflict Yemen.

6. Publication Plans

The workshop aims to develop a focused and coordinated publication strategy in consultation with the Gulf Research Center (GRC), with the objective of maximising the academic and policy impact of the research contributions. The proposed strategy will prioritise an edited academic volume, complemented by opportunities for publication in peer-reviewed journals and the GRC Papers series.

6.1. Edited Academic Volume (Primary Publication Route)

The primary publication objective is to produce an edited academic volume provisionally titled:

Yemen at the Gulf's Crossroads: State Fragmentation, Regional Order, Peacebuilding, and the Future of Gulf–Yemen Relations.

The volume will bring together selected papers from the workshop, offering an interdisciplinary analysis of Yemen–Gulf relations and their implications for regional security, political order, and sustainable peace. It will be structured around the workshop's five research themes:

- Part I: Yemen's Political Fragmentation and the Future of Gulf–Yemen Relations.
- Part II: Yemen and the Transformation of Gulf and Red Sea Security.
- Part III: Gulf States and the Political Settlement in Yemen.
- Part IV: Gulf–Yemen Economic Interdependence and Post-Conflict Recovery.
- Part V: Inclusive Peacebuilding, Civil Society, and Human Security.

The volume will include an introductory chapter establishing its conceptual and analytical framework, alongside a concluding chapter examining the wider regional and policy implications of the research findings.

Potential Publishers:

The workshop directors will explore publication opportunities with established international academic publishers, particularly:

- Routledge (Taylor & Francis).
- Palgrave Macmillan (Springer Nature).
- Manchester University Press.

The suitability of relevant book series, including Identities and Geopolitics in the Middle East at Manchester University Press, will also be explored. The final publisher and publication arrangements will be determined in consultation with GRC, subject to the assessment of the proposed volume and the publisher's editorial requirements.

6.2. Special Issue of a Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal

Selected papers that are not included in the edited volume may be considered for publication in a special issue of an established international peer-reviewed academic journal. Potential journals include:

- Journal of Arabian Studies (Routledge, Taylor & Francis).
- British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (Taylor & Francis).
- Middle Eastern Studies (Taylor & Francis).
- Contemporary Arab Affairs (Brill).

These journals have been identified based on their relevance to the workshop's central themes, particularly Yemen–Gulf relations, regional security, political transformation, conflict resolution, governance, and peacebuilding. The workshop directors, in consultation with GRC, will explore the feasibility of developing a special issue proposal with the most suitable journal. Alternatively, selected contributions may be submitted individually for consideration through the journals' regular publication processes.

All submissions will be subject to the respective journals' editorial policies, independent peer-review procedures, and publication requirements.

6.3. Individual Academic and Policy Publications

Other papers demonstrating strong academic quality and originality may be developed for publication as individual articles in relevant peer-reviewed journals. Papers with particular policy relevance may also be considered for publication through the GRC Papers series, especially those addressing regional security, political settlement, governance, economic recovery, and peacebuilding.

The workshop directors will coordinate with GRC to identify the most appropriate publication route for each contribution, taking into account its academic quality, originality, thematic relevance, and policy value.

6.4. Editorial Coordination and Publication Timeline

Following the workshop in Cambridge on 20–22 July 2027, authors will be invited to revise their papers in light of the feedback received from the workshop directors, discussants, and participants. The directors will coordinate the selection and development of manuscripts for the proposed publication routes in consultation with GRC.

The revised papers are expected by 20 September 2027, with the relevant publication proposals and materials submitted to the selected publishers and journal editors by 30 September 2027. All publications will be subject to the relevant editorial and peer-review procedures and will comply with GRC/GRCC publication and copyright policies.

7. **References**

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Richmond, O. P. (2016). Peace Formation and Political Order in Conflict Affected Societies. Oxford University Press.

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Vertin, Z. (2019). Red Sea rivalries: The Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and the new geopolitics of the Red Sea. Brookings Institution.

8. **Workshop Directors**

Dr. Ahmed Al-Maweri holds a PhD in Public Administration and is currently an Associate Professor of Practice of Public Administration at the Doha Institute (DI) for Graduate Studies, and Director of the Excellence Center for Training and Consulting at the DI. He worked as an associate professor at Sana'a University, Deputy Director of the Center for Public Administration Development, Head of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at Sana'a University, Certified Higher Education Evaluator with the Council for Academic Accreditation, advisor to the Ministry of Higher Education, and Executive Director of the National Center for Strategic

Studies which belongs to the President of the Republic. He worked as an expert for many international organizations for several years and has long experience in the field of consulting and training with many international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations. He has published several research papers in peer-reviewed Arab and foreign journals, and has contributed to a number of published books. His research interests focus on the areas of administrative and institutional reform, human resources management, strategic planning, governance and partnership between the government and NGOs, and decentralization. He teaches many courses, including public administration and local administration, strategic management, HRM, contemporary issues in public administration, institutional reform, public administration in the Arab World, and administrative leadership.

Ahlam Al-Moflhi is a Yemeni political affairs officer, peacebuilding practitioner, and researcher affiliated with the Yemen and Gulf Center for Studies (YGCS). Her areas of expertise include international relations, international law, peacebuilding, migration and refugee studies, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Euro-Arab relations, and Gulf-Yemen affairs.

She currently serves as Director of the Women, Peace and Security Studies Program at YGCS. Her professional experience spans more than two decades in diplomacy, political affairs, international cooperation, and multilateral engagement, including interactions with the European Union, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Parliament, NATO, the League of Arab States, and the United Nations.

Al-Moflhi holds four graduate degrees, including three degrees from the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in Political Science, International Relations, and European Studies, in addition to a Master's degree from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University. She also holds specialized academic qualifications in International Law and has completed advanced professional training in diplomacy, mediation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding through leading international institutions, including the United Nations, the Hague Academy of International Law, the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, the College of Europe, and the Turkish Diplomatic Academy.

Her research focuses on Yemen's political transformation, Gulf-Yemen relations, migration and refugee governance, human security, women's participation in peace processes, regional security, and peacebuilding. Her work contributes to academic and policy discussions on conflict transformation, inclusive peacebuilding, state fragmentation, regional security, migration governance, and the relationship between local and regional actors in shaping sustainable peace and institutional recovery in Yemen and the wider Gulf region.