

## A MONTHLY REVIEW OF EURO-GULF RELATIONS

A Euro-Gulf Information Centre Publication  
DECEMBER 2018

### THE SAGA CONTINUES

## Iraq - Gulf Relations in a Changing Region



Among the most crucial dossiers on the desk of the newly appointed President of Iraq, Barham Saleh, and the prospective new Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, is Iraq's relationship to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Iraq-GCC relations strained in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion

of the country and worsened under (former) Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—leader of the Shia-dominated Da'wa party and Iraqi Prime Minister from 2006 until 2014. Al-Maliki was regarded, in the GCC, as being too close, almost dependent, on Iran. During those years, relations between the Arab Gulf monarchies

and Iraq went from icy to outright tense as the region descended into a sectarian confrontation with Baghdad as a key flash-point. When al-Maliki resigned (2014), his successor, Haider al-Abadi, sought rapprochement with Iraq's Arab neighbours. Merely a year later and Saudi Arabia reopened its embassy

in Baghdad after 25-years of diplomatic deepfreeze. In 2017, the two countries inaugurated a Coordination Council, aimed at strengthening cooperation in trade and investments, people-to-people ties, and, importantly, security and post-war reconstruction. Al-Abadi had to walk a tightrope, balancing his

*Continued PAGE 8*

## Death of a President, End of an Era

George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st President of the United States, died on 30 November 2018, at 94 years of age. Born in Massachusetts in 1924, Bush enlisted in the Navy follow-

ing Japan's 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbour and quickly became a decorated Navy pilot. The World War II veteran then moved to Texas to become a successful executive in his

own oil companies, before deciding to enter politics in the 1960s. After four years representing Texas in Congress, with the Republican Party, Bush was nominated Ambassador to the United

*Continued PAGE 6*

LISTEN TO OUR PODCASTS



OR VISIT  
EGIC.INFO/PODCASTS



# HISTORY IN FOCUS

## LESSONS FROM THE "FIRST BREXIT"

### Britain, The Gulf and the Wider World

It's often repeated that Brexit is an unprecedented moment in UK and EU history. But there has already been a 'Brexit', a sudden British withdrawal from a close and synergistic relationship with foreign partners; a decision which divided domestic opinion while leaving the rest of world perplexed. The first Brexit was the British government's decision in January 1968 to withdraw from its role as formal protector of a clutch of territories 'East of Suez' in the Arabian Gulf and in East Asia (the actual withdrawal took place in 1971). It was an exit the current British government admits regretting. Now, the Conservatives are courting the very states unceremoniously abandoned in 1968, and its Gulf pivot looks like becoming a major long-term pillar of its foreign policy. But has 'Global Britain' – the current buzzword among Brexiteers for the agile, open and prosperous post-EU UK – learned the right lesson from the jettisoning of its position in the Gulf fifty years ago? And what can Britain's first Brexit tell us about the current one? Britain became protector of the modern-day UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman in a series of treaties between the 1830s and World War I. Until the Second World War the Gulf's importance to Britain centred on India: it was a conduit for Indian trade and communications, and served as a cordon sanitaire against potential rivals for



power in the subcontinent. After World War II oil became increasingly important. The UK's interest in the Gulf was also dictated

of the territories were very small in terms of area and population), legitimacy and a source of expertise in areas such as infrastruc-



by the Cold War; like the Americans in Indo-China, the British saw the spectre of Communism hanging over the region. Meanwhile, for Gulf rulers the British link provided protection (many

ture and internal security. Thus, by the 1960s, there were compelling reasons for the British to maintain their Gulf primacy. Why, then, did Harold Wilson's Labour government

decide to quit in 1968? The British position in the Arabian Gulf was untenable, and for three reasons. First, although the local Gulf rulers enjoyed the benefits of British protection, the majority of Arab opinion was against it. Kuwait had already severed its ties with Britain in 1960 for this reason. Second, the withdrawal from East of Suez must be seen as part of a broader tableau of British international readjustment after World War II. This was the era of decolonization and the push for European Union membership: Britain was winding down its pretensions to globalism and focusing more on Europe. Third were domestic considerations. A currency crisis of 1967 forced the government to devalue Sterling and to introduce extensive spending cuts. To maintain military bases thousands of miles away while inflation and industrial stagnation were starting to bite at home was politically unacceptable. The short-term legacy of the first Brexit was clear: it downgraded Britain's international status and plunged the Gulf into insecurity. The abruptness of the decision was regarded as a betrayal by both local Gulf rulers and Washington. The withdrawal was the cue for Iran and Iraq to intensify a long-running feud over regional primacy. However, from other perspectives the results are more ambivalent. The USA (not the USSR) took on the burden of policing the Gulf, the Gulf states

# Boris Johnson: A Legacy of Chaos

Former UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson, was hired to ensure cohesion among the different factions of the Conservative party and provide Britain with a stable government to guide the country through Brexit. However, Johnson's time in office not only fell short of that goal but also provided unprecedented uncertainty over the UK's foreign affairs role. In the Arab

Gulf—the focus of this Info-sheet—are situated traditional allies, strategic resources and keys to British foreign policy which are set to become even more important after Brexit. **Boris of Arabia?** The UK and Saudi Arabia have long-standing relations. Their origins go back to WWI, when Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud signed the 1915 Treaty of Darin with the British government to ensure military

cooperation against the common Ottoman enemy. The UK's role as a security guarantor for Saudi Arabia and the wider Arab Gulf continued until 1971; the date of the UK's withdrawal from East of Suez. The UK's legacy remains substantial. Until today, for instance, Britain supplies weapons and services to Saudi Arabia's Armed Forces under the Saudi-British Defence Cooperation Programme (SBDCP)

and the SALAM Project. The UK-Headquartered arms company, BAE Systems, is the main non-US supplier of...

READ THE FULL ARTICLE



OR VISIT  
EGIC.INFO/BORIS-JOHNSON-A-  
LEGACY-OF-CHAOS

themselves quickly made the transition to independence and the UK proved partially successful at re-adjusting its global role in accordance with its reduced economic power. Moreover, after the shock subsided, Britain and the Gulf states maintained cordial if less intimate relations. It is these relations that the May government is at pains to build on. Addressing Middle Eastern and Gulf leaders in Bahrain in 2016, Boris Johnson conceded that 'disengagement East of Suez was a mistake', and declared that Britain was determined to develop with renewed vigour security, trade and investment links with its former protégés. Continuing Gulf investment in London, the expansion of British prestige brands in the Gulf market and deepening military cooperation are the cornerstones of this Gulf policy. In many ways, UK-Gulf diplomacy is a perfect example of the fluid bridge-building that post-Brexit Britain must perform with important regions, inter-

national organizations and states. It is not without risks and drawbacks. Promised military investment in the Gulf may be undermined by UK budget restraints. Even if the military schemes are realised, a recent think tank report has cautioned that Britain could end up with a Gulf presence 'large enough to get us into trouble but too small to get us out of trouble once it starts'. The Gulf is important but there are also numerous sources of danger and instability, including links to terrorism, ongoing conflicts and diplomatic rows in Yemen and Qatar, and perennial questions over Iran. Finally, close connections between London and regimes such as that of Saudi Arabia will continue to provoke criticism on human rights grounds. What of the broader lessons of 1968 for Brexit Britain? Perhaps the most important is in terms of perception. After its 1968 decision, the UK was viewed negatively by its Gulf partners, summarily cut adrift after more than a century of protection,

and by Britain's Cold War allies, who were now faced with an unwanted financial and strategic burden. There was no convincing and attractive narrative to make this more palatable – simply unilateral withdrawal in Britain's self-interest. This bears striking resemblance to contemporary international attitudes towards Britain. The UK government needs to do something about this. 'Global Britain' must become a meaningful and attractive perception-changer around the world. And here the Gulf pivot, with its concentration on security and hard power, has its limits. Britain's attraction to many states and societies rests on its rich 'soft power' resources and its reputation as a champion of liberty and human rights. Preoccupied with its Brexit negotiations and scrambling for trade deals, the May government seems to be overlooking this. And while Brexiteers may relish turning the country's focus beyond Europe, they ought to be mindful of the long-term importance of reas-

suring and conciliating its soon-to-be former EU partners. The Irish border issue is the obvious case which requires the practice of pragmatic emollience from London. In regard to continental Europe, cultural and emotional bridges need to be built even if institutional ones are being burned. Britain needs to invest in diplomatic staff, British Council facilities, the BBC World Service – who knows, perhaps even offer the Elgin Marbles to Greece! In any case, Britain's reembrace of East of Suez fifty years after leaving can only be one piece of a much bigger and infinitely more challenging foreign policy package.

BY GERALD POWER

VISIT THE "HISTORY" SECTION  
SCAN THE CODE



OR VISIT  
EGIC.INFO/HISTORY

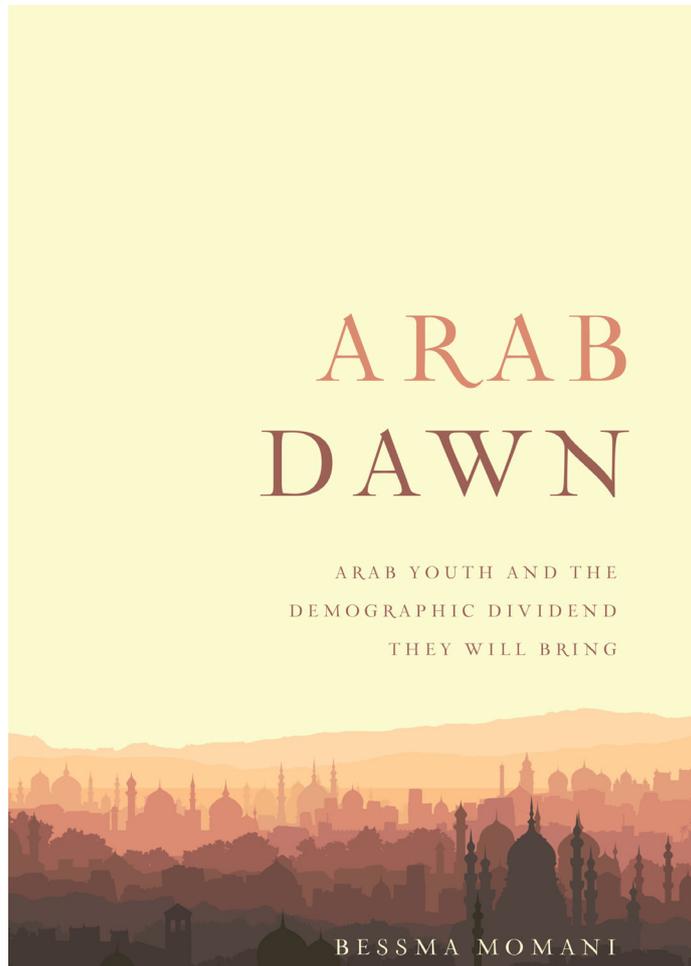
# BOOK REVIEW

## ARAB DAWN

### ARAB YOUTH AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND THEY WILL BRING

BY  
BESSMA MOMANI

Terrorism, violence and sectarianism shape Western perception of the Middle East. According to the author, Bessma Momani, a specialist in foreign policy and economy of the Middle East, there is a lot more behind the story of the Arab countries. Momani sees the biggest potential in the Arab youth, young people full of hope, striving for economic, social and political progress in the region. The Arab youth should be looked at as the main driving force behind changes in the Arab region, that are taking place alongside processes of globalization and modernization. The youth is looking for leaders who will deliver prosperity and return confidence to the future of the Arab society. As a consequence of the Arab Spring in 2011, the Arab population had to face many challenges such as cultural polarization, sectarian conflicts, discrimination and stagnation on both economic and political level. However, the Arab youth is still dreaming to be the fuel which would secure a prosperous future of the region. Young people in the Middle East are sick of empty promises. They want change. In terms of its structure, the book is very well written. It gives the reader an opportunity to understand why the author perceives the Arab youth as the most important driver of the change in the region. Momani emphasizes how the international financial crisis accompanied by a rise in inflation, deter-



mining the decrease of wages and increase of prices, influenced most Arab countries. Thus, in the first chapter, 'Introduction', the author described the youth as a part of the population who differs from one state to another but jointly depends on global economy and social values. In the second chapter of the book, called 'Bread', Momani argues that education opens the door for young people seeking better life, and that this is especially true for women. It is understandable that the author, herself a woman, discusses the phenomenon of

women's education, life traps and opportunities in the Arab countries. For most women, education opens more opportunities and therefore makes them less dependent on men. Many Arab young men, who participated in a cross-national survey, conducted by Momani for this volume, said that women should take care of houses and children. According to the author, young women in the Arab world want to be independent and educated while being married and hence pose challenges to regional society norms. Due to high unemployment

in the region, young Arabs pursue higher education as an accelerator. The Arab world, argues the author, should rely on the youth in order to boost its economy. Young people in the Arab world blame socio-cultural differentiation for stagnating economic and political progress. As it is pointed out in the third chapter called 'Freedom', young Arabs think differently than the elderly. The former are very much engaged in civic issues, especially thanks to the spread of technologies and access to information sharing, exposing them to a wide range of ideas and opinions on different socio-political concerns. Nowadays, young people in the Arab region have the opportunity to access various tv channels and political shows that talk about governments and their failures, providing information about political and social events. Thus, a critical conscience has developed with regards to issues of nepotism, corruption, unemployment. In the fourth chapter, called 'Identity', Momani discussed identity issues emphasizing how modernity and tradition can go hand in hand. Most Arab youth have strong faith in Islam, however they feel religiosity has been transformed in a political tool or a tool for societal control. Young people of the Arab world, mainly women, claim that wearing the hijab should be their personal choice. However, many times women wear a hijab to avoid public harassment or pressure

from their families. Because of the increased mobility of young Arabs, multiculturalism and foreign cultures have reached Arab societies and it is not unusual to see a woman wearing a hijab and blue jeans. Migration can also play a role. Today, many young Arabs living in the West maintain close relations with home and people are more interlinked thanks to new technologies and telecommunications. Young Arab people are exposed to different cultures and values and at times act as transmitters to bring those back to the Arab society. Momani therefore views the Arab youth as having a positive impact not only on the Arab region

but also on Western countries, in a kind of circularity. In spite of its comprehensiveness, there are two critical points lacking and that might further enhance this book. First, the author never refers to Arab migrants having a negative effect on Western societies. Yet many Western countries are struggling with radicalisation of migrants in the form of extremism and violence. Second, in the beginning of the book, Momani makes a connection between the Arab world and terrorism, but she could go deeper and analyse why is it so and how Arabs perceive this "label". The book was written in a way to offer suggestions

for governments to find solutions, especially in the conclusion chapter, putting emphasis on development of telecommunications, infrastructure, banking and engineering to provide more job opportunities for the Arab youth. Probably the most important suggestion by the author is the fact that governments must forget about ethnic, religious and identity differences and engage young people in socio-economic and political decision-making. Momani demonstrates that the biggest positive change to the Arab countries is dependent on the youth and that they should be given more opportunities to engage with government decision-making.

This book can be used as an outlook for future surveys and for scholars who want to contribute to the topic of Arab countries' development mainly from the social perspective. It provides deep analysis about how the youth in the Arab region pursue their dreams through achieving higher-education, however they are not provided with sufficient range of employment opportunities and therefore choose migration as a way out. This work is essential to understand the inside dynamics of the Arab population, and their impact on the region and the West.

BY JASMINA AMETI

## National Days in the Gulf

Violence in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) is ongoing. Despite this, the Arab Gulf has, so far, remained largely untouched by regional turmoil. Weak states, porous borders, sectarianism and the absence of a national identity can be identified as key drivers for the spread of regional violence. In such context, the celebrations for the national days, which have the purpose of boosting unity and defining the national identity, and recently took place in several Gulf countries, are more important than ever before. On 2 December 2018 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) celebrated its 47th National Day. The National Day falls on the anniversary of the federal unification of the seven emirates in 1971 which combined to form the modern-day country, headed by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the

federation's first president. Additionally, the year 2018 marks 100 years since the birth of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the Founding Father of the UAE, who passed away in 2004. The UAE is currently in the first line of fire in the fight against terrorism, radical Islamism and Iranian interference in the Gulf. This makes Abu Dhabi one of the most important strategic partners of the US in the region. On 16 December 2018 Bahrain celebrated its 47th National Day. The Kingdom declared independence from the British following a United Nations survey of the Bahraini population, an unprecedented event in the Gulf. Bahrain's population is split between sectarian lines. As such, constructing a national identity and bringing people together during the national day is particularly important. The

National Day is a time during which sectarian divisions are less relevant, and during which people can reflect on the democratic developments allowed by the National Charter of Bahrain, initiated by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. On 18 December 2018 Qatar celebrated its National Day. It is the most ancient national day in the Gulf. Every 18th of December Qataris celebrate the date in 1878 on which Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al-Thani succeeded his father as the emir and started the unification of the Qatari peninsula. This year celebration will be characterised by the largest military parade in the history of the country's armed forces. For the second consecutive year Qatar will be celebrating its national day emphasising how the decision by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE to cut all ties to

Doha—the four countries accuse Qatar of supporting nefarious groups across the region—has created a sense of unity among nationals and residents in the peninsula. Celebrating national unity in the Gulf can have a number of different purposes. Reminding its citizens the importance of joining forces in a federal state (UAE), bridging the sectarian divide to advance towards democracy (Bahrain) or reinforcing national cohesion in difficult times (Qatar). However, all these celebrations share a strong effort to remark the importance of the national identity, in order to prevent the same societal fractures which have often facilitated violence and chaos in the Middle East and beyond.

BY ANTONINO OCCHIUTO

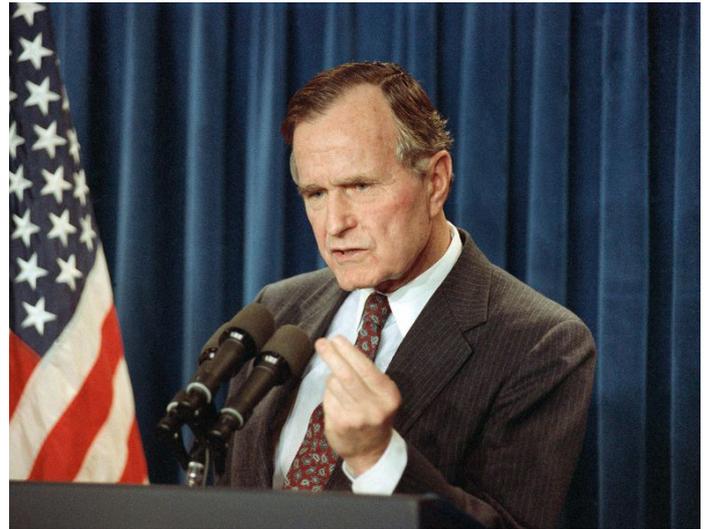
# Death of a President, End of an Era

PRESIDENT GEORGE HERBERT WALKER BUSH OBITUARY

FROM PAGE 1

Nations by (then) President Richard Nixon in 1971. He was Chairman of the Republican National Committee during the turbulent days of the Watergate Scandal that would, ultimately, result in Nixon's resignation in 1974. From 1976 to 1977 he served as Director of Central Intelligence and then from 1977 to 1979 he was Director of the Council on Foreign Relations, thus shaping a remarkably strong profile in foreign affairs, international relations and international security. In 1980, George H. W. Bush ran in Republic Party primaries where he developed a platform of moderation against a more conservative Ronald Reagan. He lost and decided to join Reagan's ticket and became his Vice-President until 1989. Bush was, however, never fully accepted into President Reagan's inner circle, and remained a low-profile Vice President. As a result, he could take the distances from the 1986 Iran-contra scandalous affair of the Reagan presidency. i.e.. when the US sold military equipment to the Islamic Republic of Iran to obtain the release of American hostages held in Lebanon and then funded anti-com-

munist "contra" rebels in Nicaragua with the profits. He further distanced himself from Ronald Reagan as he ran for the office of Presidency in 1988. He built his profile as a pragmatic public servant espousing traditional conservative economic and social programmes including: support for trade, lower taxes, gun ownership, opposition to abortion, tough stance on crime. When he began his term as President of the United States, in January 1989, Bush was among the most experienced officers elected to the highest office in the history of the United States. The Presidency of George H.W. Bush was characterised by a series of watershed events for the Western world. Over the course of a single term President Bush oversaw the end of the Cold War with the fall of the Soviet Union, the break-up of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall. He famously declared the beginning of a 'new world order' in 1991, the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar system, with the US as the only world's superpower. In fact, from 1991, the US was largely seen as the leader and, at times, enforcer, of a new



economic model, a certain equilibrium and scheme in international politics as well as international security. The US was the world's policeman, a role that it only began to ebb some twenty years later. Among his significant initiatives for international economic engagements was the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico, one of the most important Free Trade Agreements of the times. However, President George H.W. Bush is especially remembered for his impact of international politics and security and, especially, for his role in the Gulf War (1991). In the Gulf, Iraq and Iran had been at war for eight years when George H.W. became President. The U.S. had understood the war as a way to weaken the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had emerged in the 1979 Islamic revolution and was regarded as a hostile force in Washington especially following the US Embassy hostage taking. Meanwhile, the US had a primary interest in maintaining stability on the Arab shores of the

Gulf, from where some 25% of US-bound crude oil imports originated. However, President Bush, and his administration, initially failed to appreciate the danger posed by Iraq under Saddam Hussein—despite the hostile rhetoric from Baghdad against other regional allies of the US and the United States itself. The Bush administration famously miscalculated so deeply that it instructed the (then) US Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, to relay to Saddam Hussein that the US had 'no opinion of Arab-Arab conflicts, such as your dispute with Kuwait.' Taking this as a declaration of neutrality on behalf of Washington, a month later, in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait—which held 10% of the world's known oil reserves at the time. The US was caught by surprise, but the Bush administration quickly developed a response. Gathering a coalition of some thirty states, President Bush obtained a United Nations mandate and approval from the US Congress to launch Operation Desert Shield followed by Operation Desert Storm.



The war to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait by reducing its capacity to wage war commenced on 17 January 1991 and victory was declared just over a month later on 28 February. Regional stability was thus restored but there was not push for regime change at the time. Iraq was simply put under quarantine after the liberation of Kuwait. The Presidency of George H.W. Bush is also remembered for a substantial dip-

lomatic breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact in 1991, Bush sponsored the Madrid Conference bringing together Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). That conference generated a number of positive outcomes both at the level of Israel's relations with the PLO than at the level of Israel's relations with other Arab countries. In fact, the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations which followed eventually

led to the exchange of letters and the subsequent signing of the Oslo I Accords, on 13 September 1993. The multilateral track launched in Madrid about the shared regional issues water, environment, arms control, refugees and economic development, led to significant improvement in practical cooperation as well as the signing of the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty. While, inevitably, tainted by controversies and ques-

tionable choices, the career of President George H.W. Bush is arguably one of a true statesman and public servant, who strove to find the middle ground in political affairs. In 1964, H.W. Bush noted that 'When the word moderation becomes a dirty word, we have some soul searching to do.' How right he was.

BY CINZIA BIANCO

## Qatar, Turkey and Germany: Doha Between Survival and Regional Ambitions

Doha's foreign policy has been at the centre of the geopolitical storm since Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani removed his father from Qatar's throne in 1995 in a bloodless coup. To expand its regional influence, the new Emir used an array of soft power tools to brand a modern leadership on the right side of history and supportive of the 2011 uprisings. This has been eclipsed by a new, more assertive approach that bleeds

soft and hard power together. After 1996, Qatar has been carefully hedging between Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and has attempted to remain an indispensable ally of the United States (US), which relies on the Qatar-based Al-Udeid Air Base for most of its Middle East operations. Such balancing has been crucial, until now, to allow Doha to carry out an active foreign policy while avoiding the backlashes from the

bigger powers. As a small state in a region in turmoil, Qatar cannot afford to alienate Saudi Arabia, a leader in the Arab world and in the Sunni Umma. On the other hand, Doha's economic prosperity and thus the legitimacy of Qatar's current leadership, depends on the South Pars gas field which is shared between Qatar and Iran. The situation changed in June 2017 as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the

UAE, interrupted diplomatic relations with Qatar. Iran successfully exploited Qatar's need for food supplies and import-export routes to attempt to drag Doha into...

READ THE FULL ARTICLE  
SCAN THE CODE



OR VISIT  
[EGIC.INFO/QATAR-TURKEY-AND-GERMANY](http://EGIC.INFO/QATAR-TURKEY-AND-GERMANY)



**EGIC**  
Euro-Gulf  
Information  
Centre



[WWW.EGIC.INFO](http://WWW.EGIC.INFO)



# Iraq - Gulf Relations in a Changing Region

FROM PAGE 1

country's relations with Iran, still an important actor for Iraq, the GCC ridden by the Qatar crisis, in which al-Abadi maintained neutrality, and international players such as the US and Europe, heavily involved in the fight against the so-called Islamic State (Daesh) on Iraqi territory. As Daesh was territorially defeated in 2018, Iraq's priority has centred on rebuilding the country, in terms of infrastructures, governance, national unity, and security. Support is sorely needed from international partners and from its neighbours. Among the GCC countries, Kuwait seems to be at the forefront of these efforts. For a small state, Kuwait, which shares a 240km-long border with Iraq, a more stable and more secure neighbour is a matter of national security. In February 2018 Kuwait organised an International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq, co-chaired by the European Union (EU). During the conference, Kuwait pledged \$1 billion in loans and another \$1 billion as investments, the highest pledge in relative terms of the total \$30 billion raised. Kuwait also stepped in as a conduit for another significant and impactful item of Iraq-GCC

cooperation— electricity. In summer 2018, large-scale protests erupted in the Basra region of Iraq after the Iranian government cut one-third of the total electricity used in the region. Iran pointed the finger at the combination of the re-imposition of US sanctions, spiralling energy demands, its own economic woes and non-payment of bills from Iraq. Iraq turned to Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh agreed to provide the region of Basra with emergency fuel, and to enter into tripartite negotiations, with Kuwait, for a long-term solution. Indeed, Kuwait has been keen to discuss a plan to extend the GCC electricity grids to Iraq. Saudi Arabia would build a 3,000-megawatt solar power plant and export cheap electricity to Iraq via Kuwait, once the existing interconnected grids would be reinforced. This long-term project of electricity diplomacy might provide just the kind of interlinkages needed to strengthen Iraq-GCC relations at the deep level of good governance, a strategic goal for Iraq. Against this background, President Saleh toured Gulf capitals in November 2018; to shore up regional support for his nascent administration and start building personal ties to the neigh-

bours. He began his tour in Kuwait City where talks were held with the Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Iraq's President then visited Abu Dhabi where he met with the Crown Prince and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. In the same days, Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi was receiving Saudi Minister for Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Al-Faleh in Baghdad. While the premise for reinforcing Iraq-GCC relations have been, arguably, already mapped, challenges remain. The economic influence of Iran is still very much entrenched in the country's system. During the Baghdad International Fair, which took place 10-19 November — and is one of the most important events of its kind — some 60 Iranian firms were present in contrast to a single UAE company and none from Saudi Arabia. President Saleh is expected to visit Tehran soon. While there is hesitation in the Arab Gulf monarchies to deepening engagement before a definitive government is formed,

political machinations should not restrict state-to-state engagement. Finally, there is the question of the intra-GCC crisis re-erupted in June 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut relations with Qatar. This crisis inevitably reflects on Iraq-GCC relations: first, a key issue of contention with Qatar is that Doha paid a large ransom to Iran-allied Iraqi militias to free a group of Qatari royals taken hostage in the Iraqi desert, and this episode has negative impacts on the perception of Iraq-Qatar relations for a number of regional government. At the same time, while Iraq has refused to take sides in the dispute, Baghdad is pushing behind the scenes for the conflict to be resolved as regional tensions are often mirrored in highly-tense and sectarian Iraqi domestic politics. Thus, prolonged intra-Sunni tensions can effectively function as an obstacle to developing much-needed enhanced relations between Baghdad and its royal neighbours.

BY CINZIA BIANCO





## WOMEN IN THE GULF

Exploring the evolution of the political, economic and social status of women in the wider Arab Gulf region.



Scan me

[EGIC.INFO/WOMEN-IN-THE-GULF](http://EGIC.INFO/WOMEN-IN-THE-GULF)

# BEYOND THE WAR

## UNDERSTANDING SAUDI ARABIA'S HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS IN YEMEN, KSRELIEF OPERATIONS AND MORE

Yemen's civil war is among the many conflicts unfolding in the Middle East. However, due to its geographic proximity – along the porous southern deserts of Saudi Arabia – it is certainly the conflict which threatens Riyadh's strategic interests most potentially. Much has been written on motivations, condemnations and/or support for the intervention of the Arab coalition in Yemen. But to be clear, this is not a Saudi or an Emirati war. Under their (Saudi-Emirati) umbrella to limit and push-back the Iranian-linked Houthi militias, which had internally exiled the UN-legitimised government, is a wide number of regional actors such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. So, the conflict is more varied than most narrative would suppose. The purpose of this work is to provide a more comprehensive picture regarding Saudi Arabia's Yemen policy beyond its military engagement. A stable Yemen is crucial to the security and prosperity of Saudi Arabia, even more so for the Kingdom's southern provinces of Najran and Jizan. The war in Yemen has forced a tidal wave of civilians to cross the border and seek shelter in Saudi Arabia. As the war continues and the levels of poverty in Yemen rises, Saudi Arabia will

face an increasing number of refugees. A war-torn and impoverished Yemen is also ideal for radicalisation and the recruitment of ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—powerful terrorist organisations which target, when possible, Saudi Arabia as a matter of ideology. **SAUDI ARABIA IN YEMEN**

The well-documented and widespread use of air power by Saudi Arabia's military, in support of Yemen government forces and targeting Houthi positions, has inadvertently taken a toll on Yemen's civilian population, especially in areas occupied by the insurgents. Air strikes during war, particularly in mountainous regions and populated urban centres, carry the risk of collateral damage. In Yemen, this goes hand in hand with the lack of familiarity of the situation on the ground, that the Kingdom's air force has to cope with. What is less well known and certainly under-documented, are Saudi Arabia's efforts to contain such impacts through humanitarian relief campaigns, which begun less than two months after the military campaign commenced. In particular, in May 2015, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, ordered the creation of the King Salman Centre for Relief and Humanitarian Aid (KS-



Relief), directed by Senior Advisor to the Royal Court Dr Abdullah Al-Rabeeah. Since its creation, the centre has focused its activities almost entirely on Yemen. **TOP HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES**

In Yemen, KSRelief cooperates with a wide range of NGO's and UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), to ensure that aid reaches civilians including in areas controlled by Houthi militias. In particular, KSRelief pioneered two major initiatives. First, the establishment of anti-cholera centres. Cholera, erupted in Houthi-controlled areas, has killed nearly 2,000 people and infected more than 500,000 people in one of the world's worst outbreaks of the disease in the past 50 years. The second, is related to the rehabilitation of child soldiers. To contrast the military efforts of the coalition, Houthi fighters have gang-pressed children to fight in their ranks. KSRelief is

leading efforts to ensure child soldiers can recover from the severe traumas they suffered so that they can successfully be reintegrated in Yemen's society. **EFFORTS ON THE RISE**

Already in 2015, KSRelief ranked first, globally, in terms of the total volume of aid provided to Yemen. The expenditure for that year reached some \$413 million (USD). The escalating conflict against the Houthis in 2017-2018, has been coupled with the increase in the number of projects implemented by KSRelief. The vast majority of such have targeted food security and famine (which affected roughly 50% of Yemen's population) with 164 project costing \$534 million (USD) in total. The cholera outbreak, accelerated by the lack of supplies caused by the ongoing fighting, forced a renewed focus on propping up Yemen's health sector. This was done through 135 specific projects costing, in total, \$454 million



## GULF MONITOR

The latest events through our insights, analyses and explanations of the unfolding dynamics in the Arab Gulf states.

[EGIC.INFO/GULF-MONITOR](http://EGIC.INFO/GULF-MONITOR)



(USD). Emergency relief coordination in areas devastated by the war, in the Taiz area in particular, has been the third most expensive set of projects. In this sector KSRelief, has implemented 24 projects accounting for \$233 million (USD). The air campaign and the fighting on the ground have severely damaged much of Yemen's infrastructure including water distribution systems and sewage treatment facilities. This has restricted an increasing number of Yemenis from accessing clean water. KS-Relief has responded by setting up 25 different projects in the fields of clean water, sanitation and hygiene investing as much as \$127 million (USD).

#### LOGISTICAL CONCERNS

In addition to the aforementioned projects implemented on the ground, the Director of the Centre, Dr Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, has often spoke about Saudi Arabia's proposal to make the Saudi port of Jizan available to international aid organisations working in Yemen. The Jizan port is a more dynamic, more reliable and more efficient facility than the Al-Hudayda port, which is controlled by the Houthis. In addition, delivering aid from Jizan would prevent Houthi fighters and criminals from diverting aid supplies for other purposes. Resolving logistical issues is considered a key priority for KS-Relief so that aid can reach

the largest possible amount of people even in the remote areas of the country. To that end, KSRelief is currently counting on the support of Saudi Arabia's Air Force to transport food and medicine to the Al-Ghaida airport in Yemen's Al-Mahra province.

\*\*\*

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) continues to monitor Saudi Arabia's Yemen priorities in the context of both the regional proxy war with Iran and the humanitarian situation. Faced with the increasing presence of the Iran-backed Houthis – along their southern border – Saudi Arabia

deployed military force which has proven costly. However, this should not eclipse the substantial effort of KSRelief on the ground. Thanks to the considerable financial resources allocated by Saudi Arabia's government, and its partnership with some 120 relief institutions, the Centre continues to improve the daily livelihood of people in the war-torn country.

BY ANTONINO OCCHIUTO

## The Iran-Al Qaeda Nexus: Two Islamisms, One Goal

Despite Tehran's robust public relations' efforts that lumps Iran, the EU and US together in combatting Islamist terrorism, the Islamic Republic's track-record reveals enhanced cooperation with an assortment of nefarious actors, terrorist groups and radical elements ranging from al-Qaeda to ISIS, Hezbollah to Saraya al-Ashtar. While utilising Shia terrorist groups are a reflection of Iran's foreign policy, Tehran has sought to shroud its relationship to Sunni groups. It argues that being a Shia theocracy has placed it in the crosshairs of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS. However, It should be remembered that Iran routinely places its strategic priorities above its ideological orientation and has never hesitated to

support Sunni groups (re: Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad) or even Christian groups (re: Iran supports Christian Armenia against Shia Azerbaijan) in pursuit of its overall strategic goals—1. Bleeding-out the US in the region, 2. Undermining stability in the Sunni Arab Gulf countries, 3. Achieving regional hegemony.

This briefing traces some of the particulars of the al-Qaeda-Iran relationship.

\*\*\*

Tehran views al-Qaeda as a 'tactical ally' and while the two are not in ideological parity they do recognise each other as retaining tactical and, to some degree strategic, harmony. Characteristically, tactical

alliances are conditioned neither by ideological affinity, identical strategic objectives nor by mutual trust. Instead, tactical cooperation is conditioned by the perception of common interests and identification of a common enemy. This sets the blueprint for al-Qaeda-Iran cooperation—termed here as AQ-I. The AQ-I alliance commenced in the early 1990's when Osama bin Laden, himself, met with important Iranian and Hezbollah representatives — notably Imad Mughniyah — in Sudan. Encouraged by Hasan al-Turabi's initiative to establish an unified global Islamic effort against 'common enemies' (re: primarily Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel), Iran and al-Qaeda reached an informal agreement to cooperate,

trade expertise, intelligence and equipment. Then, in April 1991, Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's current leader and former bin Laden deputy (who was a vocal supporter of the 1979 Islamic Revolution), secretly visited Iran. During his visit, al-Zawahiri enquired whether Iran could support his organisation, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and assist it in overthrowing Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. After al-Zawahiri's request, Iran began to provide training for EIJ members in their camps in Iran and Sudan as well as provided \$2 million in direct financial support. As a result of the growing friendship between the Islamic Republic and al-Zawahiri, Iran extended its assistance to members of al-Qaeda. Towards the end

of the 1990's, Iran's assistance to al-Qaeda expanded to include specialised training in building improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and operational training for suicide missions. This support from Tehran to al-Qaeda resulted in the successful attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. Iran became the key facilitation hub for al-Qaeda's operatives and their regional affiliates. Bin Laden himself described Iran as al-Qaeda's 'main artery for funds, personnel, and communication, since Tehran allows the terrorist organisation to use its territory as a transit point for funnelling money and people from donors in Gulf countries such as Qatar. It also became a route for smuggling jihadis between Iraq and Afghanistan and, importantly, emerged as a major actor in drug smuggling from the poppy fields of Afghanistan's Helmand Province to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. It was common practise, to secure logistics and facilitate al-Qaeda members' transit between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, that Iranian border guards did not stamp terrorists' passports to shield them from Saudi authorities. As a result, Iran

is guilty of indirectly assisting the preparation of the 11 September attacks. In May 2018, a US Federal Judge (re: New York), in a default judgment, found: the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, liable for the deaths of 9/11 victims and ordered Iran to pay billions of dollars in reparations to their families. Following the US intervention in Afghanistan, Iran provided safe-havens for al-Qaeda operatives and associates including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the founder of ISIS), Abu al-Walid al-Masri (a long-time al-Qaeda-Iran middleman), Saad bin Laden and Hamza bin Laden (al-Qaeda's current second in command). The CIA's release of documents seized during the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011 exposed that Iran 'offered some Saudi brothers in al Qaeda everything they needed, including money, arms and training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in exchange for striking American interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. This relationship has not ceased. From their sanctuary in Iran, al-Qaeda members have been free

to orchestrate acts of international terrorism. For example, in 2003, US intelligence intercepted communications suggesting that a cell of al-Qaeda leaders, among them Saad bin Laden and Saif al-Adel, direct bombing of a residential compounds in Riyadh. Iran has also served as a staging ground for attacks against the West, including the foiled 'Europlot,' which envisioned commando-style attacks in Germany, France and the UK. Evidence is also mounting that suggests Iran and al-Qaeda collaborate in the Yemen Civil War. According to information published by Yemen's Interior Ministry, Houthi militias — part of Iran's regional 'axis of resistance' under the direct command of Tehran — coordinates their operations to further destabilise the country with both al-Qaeda and ISIS. It is believed the leaders of al-Qaeda have settled in the city of Sanaa with the consent of the Houthi militia. Increased cooperation between al-Qaeda and Iran in Yemen is increasing the threat of ballistic terrorism. As Iran continues its support for the Houthi militias, the ballistic missile expertise Tehran provides is being transferred to al-

Qaeda's most notorious franchise: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). While Iran cannot be held accountable for direct participation in al-Qaeda's attacks, the AQ-I played a significant role in al-Qaeda's survival and enhanced global position throughout the Global War on Terror. Iran's sheltering of al-Qaeda's senior leadership and its facilitation of the group's activities contributed to the slow renaissance of the organisation - at the end of which the organisation re-emerged more powerful than ever. As Bruce Hoffman observes, 'nearly seven years after the killing of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda is numerically larger and present in more countries than at any other time in its history. The Islamic Republic of Iran thus has its fair share in the rise of al-Qaeda 2.0.

*An online version of this article that includes references and links is available at [www.egic.info/iran-alqaeda-nexus](http://www.egic.info/iran-alqaeda-nexus)*

BY LUCIE ŠVEJDOVÁ



**Visit our Library**

Find the right one for you in our unique catalogue of books and special collections in Rome.  
Completely Open. Completely Free.

#OpenAccess

EGIC.INFO/LIBRARY



**The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) is an initiative that aims to build social, political, strategic, cultural and economic bridges between the people of Europe and the Arabian Gulf.**

While the EGIC was only formed on 01 October 2015 as a legal association in Rome, Italy, it draws on the expertise of a multitude of scholars, policy makers, economists and members of European and Gulf civil societies to enhance inter-regional relations.

The EGIC has tasked itself with 5 activities over the short, medium and long terms:

- **Publishing Hub**—the first objective of the Centre is to act as a publishing hub on information related to the wider Arabian Gulf. This entails the launching of a new journal (re: The Arabian Gulf), book series, policy papers and newsletters. Literature will be made available in several languages (Arabic, English, Italian, German, French and several of the Slavonic languages) and be done in both hard and soft copy formats.
- **Seminars, Conferences and Roundtables**—in order to continue to attract attention for the Centre, a series of seminars, conferences and roundtable discussions will take place on a regular basis.
- **Specialised Certificate, Internships and Scholarship Programmes**—the EGIC will begin a targeted certificate programme for university-aged students, run as Spring Schools. Themes will vary, but stay related to European-Arabian Gulf dynamics. Also, the EGIC will also offer a 3 month internship based on the European ERASMUS Programme. This programme will focus on building the skill-set required of a socio-political organisation and includes: organisational, writing, presentation and innovative thinking skills. Finally, the EGIC will offer monthly and annual scholarships for research on Arabian Gulf-related topics.
- **Cultural Events**—the EGIC strives to offer a comprehensive cultural platform to expose the people of Europe and the Gulf to each other's cultural rites, rituals, festivals and writings. From book launches, poetry readings, talks, films and cookery, the EGIC aims to bring people together.
- **Web and Tech**—the EGIC has adopted a tech-savvy approach that entails the use of high-tech platforms to generate an interactive platform beyond the physical boundaries of the EGIC headquarters. All EGIC research and events will be made Open Access and the deployed technologies will reflect this approach.

**FIND OUT  
MORE**



**READ OUR  
PUBLICATIONS**

**WWW.EGIC.INFO**

#### **Credits**

A Special Project by  
The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC)  
Via Gregoriana 12, 00187, Rome  
www.egic.info  
info@egic.info

Designed by Arnold Koka  
at The Euro-Gulf Information Centre

Printed at  
Reggio Emilia Service di Antonio Fagioli

#### **Special Thanks to**

Gerald Power  
Lucie Švejďová

#### **Thanks to**

Mitchell Belfer,  
Martina Conte,  
Cinzia Bianco  
Antonino Occhiuto  
Jasmina Ameti