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Gulf security: changing internal and external dynamics

Kristian Ulrichsen

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Kristian Ulrichsen

Kuwait Research Fellow

Kuwait Programme for Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States

London School of Economics and Political Science

k.coates-ulrichsen@lse.ac.uk

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Gulf Security: Changing Internal and External Dynamics

KRISTIAN COATES ULRICHSEN

Abstract

The concept of 'Gulf security' is evolving in response to new challenges which link internal security to external stability and international events in the region. Food, water and energy security, managing and mitigating the impact of climate change, rapidly rising populations and the youth bulge, structural economic deficiencies and spiralling inflation, and progressive state failure in Yemen, all require a broad, global and multidimensional approach to Gulf security. While 'traditional' threats from Iraq, Iran, nuclear proliferation and transnational terrorism remain strong, these new challenges to Gulf security have the potential to strike at the heart of the social contract and redistributive mechanisms that bind state and society in the Arab oil monarchies.

This paper examines the relationship between 'traditional' and 'new' security challenges and the ongoing processes of political reform and economic liberalization and diversification in the Gulf. It explores the way in which regimes are anticipating and reacting to the shifting security paradigm, and contextualizes these changes within the broader political, economic, social and demographic framework. It argues that a holistic approach to security is necessary for regimes to renew their sources of legitimacy in a globalizing world of transnational flows and multiple layers of global governance.

This paper examines how the concept of 'Gulf security' is evolving as internal political and socio-economic changes in the Gulf states interact with the processes of globalization and the impact of international events in this volatile region.¹ Starting from the basic assumption of 'regime security', it first outlines the parameters which guide ruling elites in the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in constructing local and regional security agendas. The paper then focuses on a range of current and evolving threats to security to draw out the distinction between the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of security and how these relate to each other. This approach to security as discourse ties in to a broader theoretical literature in international relations which studies the role of beliefs and norms as social constructs in shaping approaches to questions of power and security (Wendt 1999, Buzan and Waever 2003, Price 2008). It also relates to work on security studies in the developing world, in which states and regimes may pose a threat to portions of their own societies

¹ Gulf security is defined here as focusing on the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), also termed the Gulf states, but also including Yemen (which occupies the south-western flank of the Arabian Peninsula), as well as Iraq and Iran.

and where the Western ‘idea of security’ as restricted to the external sphere is not applicable (Krause 1996: 325).

The role of agency is important in delineating the linkages between internal and external security and deciding which issues do – and do not – dominate security agendas. This is a salient characteristic of ruling elites in the Arab oil monarchies, in which the conduct of foreign and security affairs is restricted to a tightly drawn circle of senior members of the ruling family (Ehteshami 2003: 55). Our understanding of regional security policy formulation is consequently enhanced by taking into account the factors which inform regimes’ perceptions of their internal security matrix. This in turn plays a crucial role in shaping their policies towards external issues such as the unfolding post-occupation dynamics in Iraq, the ongoing dispute between Iran and the international community, and the threat posed by radicalism and transnational terrorism.

In addition to the securitization of these particular issues, the second half of this paper examines a number of longer-term, non-military challenges to security in the Gulf. It argues that changing political economies in all six GCC states need to be underpinned by a new and broader approach to national and regional security. This is necessary for tackling internal problems and minimizing their negative impact on the social contract and redistributive mechanisms which bind states and society together in the Arab oil monarchies. Ruling elites’ reliance on oil rents and external security guarantees have hitherto provided a powerful insulation from internal problems and demands while also reflecting the unorthodox nature of ‘security’ in these postcolonial states (Gause 2000: 182). Strengthening internal cohesion and creating more inclusive and sustainable polities is thus vital to overcoming the longer-term challenges to security outlined in this paper.

The paper consequently builds on the cognitive shift in thinking about global security which has occurred in an era of accelerating complexity of global interconnections and transnational flows of people, capital and ideas (Dillon 2005: 3). In 2004 the UN High-Level Report on Threats, Challenges and Change broadened the focus of security policy to encompass the issues of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and state failure in addition to more conventional threats (Roberts and Zaum 2008: 18). Transnational terrorism, cross-border criminal networks and flows, and global issues such as climate change have led to the emergence of new threats to national and international security. Increasingly, these bypass the state and erode the Cold War-era

demarcations between internal and external spheres, as states' monopoly over the legitimate use of force becomes contested by predatory rivals operating within societies and across state boundaries (Kaldor 2007: 32).

This paper is subdivided into two major sections. The first section begins with an analysis of current and future trends which are shaping the evolution of Gulf security. This provides the contextual parameters for examining the current security dynamics in the region in the light of the symbiotic connections of internal and external security with regime survival. In the second section the paper broadens its perspective to cover issues not at present on the regional security agenda and identifies their longer-term security implications if left unchecked or inadequately tackled. These issues include flawed political reform projects, demographic changes and structural unemployment, resource security and depletion, and the potential impact of climate change and environmental degradation. The conclusion considers how the Gulf states might formulate a new approach to security which is both realistic in its objectives and inclusive in its vision. Emphasis throughout is on the interconnections between the internal and external dimensions of security and their impact on the political economies of the Gulf as state–society relations are reconfigured and the social contract renegotiated in a period of transition and uncertainty.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS SHAPING THE EVOLUTION OF GULF SECURITY

Historically, the six states which now comprise the GCC have relied on an external security guarantor both to safeguard the rulers' internal position and to protect against external threats from the larger regional powers. This was especially the case among the four small sheikhdoms of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the seven Trucial States, which joined to form the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971. In the nineteenth century they constituted little more than city states dominated by local coalitions between ruling families and the merchant elites (Crystal 1990: 4). British interest in the Gulf during the nineteenth century stemmed from its strategic position on the route to India and an Anglo-Indian 'sub-imperial system' developed over the course of a century of commerce and diplomacy (Said Zahlan 1998: 15).

British hegemony in the Gulf lasted from 1820 until 1971. It began with the signature of a General Treaty in 1820 and a Maritime Truce in 1835, aimed at outlawing piracy and maritime warfare respectively. These general agreements were

followed by the conclusion of treaties with the rulers of the small coastal emirates (the Trucial States in 1835, Bahrain in 1861, Kuwait in 1899 and again in 1914, and Qatar in 1916) which placed them under British maritime protection. Aside from Kuwait, which declared independence in 1961, the treaties remained in force until the final British withdrawal from the Gulf in December 1971. During the 1960s the utility of a powerful external protector to the ruling families became evident on two notable occasions. Independent Kuwait was immediately faced by a threatened Iraq invasion in 1961 and British troops were rushed back to the emirate, while in 1968 the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai offered to pay the annual operating costs of the British military forces in the Gulf in an attempt to prevent their withdrawal by 1971 (Onley and Khalaf 2006: 204). Iran's seizure of the three islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs from the Trucial States on the day before Britain's military withdrawal on 1 December 1971 further underscored their strategic vulnerability to their larger neighbours in the absence of the external guarantor (Louis 2003: 102).

The United States has gradually filled the security gap and it replaced the British as the hegemonic power in the Gulf. In January 1980, President Jimmy Carter proclaimed the Carter Doctrine, which stated that the United States would use force if necessary to defend its interests in the Gulf.² In the three decades since 1980, all of the six GCC states have expanded and deepened their military ties with the United States, in the form of its separate defence cooperation agreements with Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, an access to facilities agreement with Oman and the wide range of military agreements which have underpinned Saudi Arabian security since the 1940s. These bilateral defence deals have greatly complicated the growth of any collective military framework at the GCC level and have also resulted in each GCC state having very small standing armies and remaining dependent on Western suppliers for expensive armaments operated largely by expatriate military personnel (Cordesman 2008: 15).

This reliance on external security guarantees notwithstanding, the Gulf remains an extremely volatile subregion with multiple and interlinking threats to internal and external security. It did not share in the transformation of security which occurred in eastern Europe and Latin America during the 1990s. In these regions,

² This was a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, and was intended by Carter to deter any other power from threatening the free movement of oil supplies or seeking to challenge US hegemony in the Gulf.

security became linked to issues of political and economic legitimacy, and the emergence of new concepts of cooperative security was associated with a shift away from realist approaches predicated on zero-sum notion of national security (Rathmell et al. 2003: 2). No such comparative shift occurred in the Gulf, which since 1980 has experienced three major interstate wars based on balance of power considerations (Furtig 2007: 639). The experience of the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8), the first Gulf war (1991) and the US-led invasion of Iraq (2003) underlined the imbalances and flaws in a regional security system overly reliant on one external power and not inclusive of the two regional powers.

The conflation of ‘regime security’ with ‘national security’ is another feature of local discourses on security in the Gulf, in common with many other developing countries. Ruling elites in all six GCC states have pursued hitherto successful strategies of survival that enabled them to manage the transition into the oil era and retain control over the processes of state formation in the last century (Kechichian 2008: 420). This notion of ‘survival’ determined how ruling elites represented and defined particular issues as threats to security (Krause 1995: 135). External security alliances, both bilaterally with the United States and multilaterally through the creation of the GCC, met internal needs by reinforcing regimes’ security as much against their own societies as against neighbouring states (Halliday 2005: 175). This became evident during an uprising in Bahrain in 1994, when the Saudi Arabian Interior Minister, Naif bin Abdulaziz, visited the capital, Manama, and declared that the security of Bahrain was inseparable from the security of Saudi Arabia, by which he meant the security of the Al-Khalifa and the Al-Saud (Fakhro 1997: 184).

The preoccupation of regimes with survival remains paramount in their construction of security strategies, but the concept of ‘Gulf security’ in coming years and decades will be intertwined with the political and economic opening up of the region. Four factors will shape the contextual framework within which it will evolve. The first is the impact of the processes of globalization and the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICT). This is creating new forms of private, public and virtual space in which to mobilize, organize and channel participatory demands.³ Globalization has also enmeshed the Gulf within a wider

³ Political bloggers were active discussants during recent parliamentary elections in Bahrain (November 2006) and Kuwait (May 2008), while online social networking websites such as Facebook

interconnected region with multiple sources of actual or potential insecurity. These include the ideational and radicalization linkages emanating within, and flowing from, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the impact of progressive state contraction and ungoverned spaces in Somalia and Yemen and their implications for maritime security, and the threat of nuclear proliferation in Iran and Pakistan (Rathmell et al. 2003: 6).

This links to the second factor, which is the growing internationalization of the Gulf and its emergence as the centre of gravity in the Middle East by virtue of its economic and financial resources (Salem 2007: 7). The rapid expansion of economic and political links with China, India and Russia is creating new strategic linkages which are shifting the international relations of the region in subtle ways (Yetiv and Lu 2007: 199). The Indian president, Manmohan Singh, visited the Gulf in November 2008 and announced that India viewed the Gulf as an intrinsic part of its broader neighbourhood. Significantly, India also signed defence cooperation agreements with both Qatar and Oman on maritime security, the sharing of data and common threat perceptions.⁴ Meanwhile China's tenth Five-Year Plan (2001–5) referred to energy security for the first time, and China has constructed a naval base at the Pakistani port of Gwadar, close to the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz (Yetiv and Lu 2007: 199). Meanwhile Russia has begun to expand significantly its political and economic links to the Gulf in general and to its fellow gas-producer Qatar and Saudi Arabia in particular, with then President Vladimir Putin's visit to the region, the first by a Soviet or post-Soviet leader, in February 2007. It formed part of a broader Russian intention to increase its role in the Middle East and become one of the key actors in any new regional security system (M. A. Smith 2007: 5).

Issues of energy dependence and security of access to regional resources give external powers a stake in regional security structures. International reactions to the outbreak of piracy in the Gulf of Aden during 2008 may prove a harbinger of future policy trends. The European Union launched its first naval mission (Operation Atlantis), while both China and India reacted with a more muscular deployment of naval forces to protect their own maritime security interests. As the Gulf's share of global oil and natural gas production is projected to increase from 28 per cent in 2000

have been embraced by a younger generation of activists who use it for debate and the coordination of activities; personal interview, Kuwait, 22 December 2008.

⁴ Qatar and India Agree to Expand Security Ties, *Gulf Times*, 10 November 2008.

to 33 per cent in 2020, with most of that increase going to Asia, its strategic significance will only increase, together with the number of external powers holding a stake in regional affairs (Cordesman 2007: 3).

Oil (and more recently natural gas) is therefore the third factor which both explains international interest in the Gulf and frames the challenges facing its political and economic evolution. Oil rents transformed the political economies of the Gulf, shaped state–society relations and distorted the economic development of the ‘rentier’ or distributive states which emerged (Halliday 2005: 271). However, oil and natural gas reserves are not distributed evenly throughout the Gulf, and pockets of energy poverty and reliance on imported natural gas (primarily from Qatar) have already emerged. This distinction will play a crucial role in shaping regional development and potential sources of tension and insecurity in the future. At 2006 production rates, and barring unexpected new discoveries, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen are projected to have exhausted their existing oil reserves by 2025 and consequently face imminent transition to post-oil states. This contrasts sharply with the other Gulf states, which do not face the same challenges of resource depletion as their reserves–production ratios are a projected 62.8 years (Qatar), 69.5 years (Saudi Arabia) and 91.9 years (United Arab Emirates).⁵

Given the centrality of oil rents in constructing and maintaining the social contract and redistributive mechanisms which bind state–society relations in rentier systems, any changes in the domestic political economies of resource distribution will pose great challenges to security and stability in states of transition. Comparative political science suggests that redistributive states are especially vulnerable to erosion of the ruling bargain and consequent loss of regime legitimacy if mechanisms for co-opting support and depoliticizing society begin to break down (Kaldor et al. 2007: 28). One prominent academic critic in Bahrain stated bluntly that ‘The future is very bleak ... the system must change or transform itself’, otherwise ‘without oil there is no future’.⁶

⁵ Figures taken from the BP *Statistical Review of World Energy* published in June 2008 (p. 6); a comparable reserves–production ratio is not available for Kuwait. In 2006 a similar projection made by Christian Koch estimated the longevity of Kuwait’s oil reserves at 110 years, in addition to slightly differing figures for the three countries cited in the BP study – Qatar (51 years), Saudi Arabia (75 years) and the United Arab Emirates (110 years). Christian Koch, *Gulf States Plan for Day that Oil Runs Dry*, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, December 2006, pp. 23–4.

⁶ Personal interview, Bahrain, 18 December 2008.

The fourth contextual factor is the continuing lack of internal consensus within the GCC itself. The GCC was established in 1981 as a political and security bulwark against revolutionary Iran. Lingering intra-regional disputes and fears of Saudi hegemony on the part of the smaller member states have hampered progress towards security cooperation, which has lagged behind economic integration. Qatar, for example, accuses Saudi Arabia of instigating two coup attempts against its emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, in 1996 and 2005 (Saif 2008: 106).⁷ The six member states have been unable to agree on the nature and extent of the threats posed by Iran and Yemen, thereby making it virtually impossible to adopt a regional approach to these issues (Kaye and Wehrey 2007: 111). Most significantly, each member state has been integrated into the US security umbrella on a bilateral basis. This strategic reality is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future and complicates any moves towards regional security cooperation.

Securitization as discourse: the ‘Shiite crescent’ theory

GCC responses to the territorially bounded issues of Iraq and Iran and the ideational challenge of transnational terrorism illustrate their awareness of the linkages between internal and external security. These interconnections have been magnified by the explosion of Arab satellite television channels and internet websites, which have accelerated the spread of transnational linkages while contributing to the creation of an Arab ‘imagined community’ (Valbjorn and Bank 2007: 9). The steady erosion of regimes’ control over the flow of information to individuals and groups within their borders directly links their internal security to these external insecurities which cannot be isolated or contained within national boundaries. Accordingly, regimes have construed these issues more as threats to their political and popular legitimacy than to their material security, and this has guided their formulation of policy to meet the challenges.

With the steady drawdown of US, British and Australian troops from Iraq ahead of the December 2011 deadline for full withdrawal, attention is turning to how the post-occupation dynamics of Iraq and its future political trajectory will affect regional security structures and threat perceptions. Thus far, the GCC states have managed to minimize their exposure to the many sources of insecurity within Iraq,

⁷ A GCC Customs Union was established in 2003 and this was followed by the creation of a common market in 2008. The creation of a common currency and full monetary integration had been planned for 2010, but is now unlikely to occur before 2015 at the earliest.

such as sectarian conflict, terrorism and large-scale refugee flows (Pollock 2007: 41). This does not mean that regional policymakers believe that the security threat from Iraq has disappeared, and the problem of integrating Iraq into the regional fold remains unresolved.⁸

Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, regional and international discourse on Iraq has been dominated by analysis of its geopolitical and strategic implications for the regional balance of power (Lowe and Spencer 2006, Yamani 2006, Carpenter and Innocent 2007, Furtig 2007, Kechichian 2007). As early as February 2003, the Saudi Arabian foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, warned President George W. Bush that he would be ‘solving one problem and creating five more’ if Saddam Hussein was removed by force.⁹ Subsequently, in 2005, he opined that the United States was ‘handing the whole country over to Iran without reason’. Officials and analysts in the Gulf viewed the empowerment of Iraq’s Shiite majority and the rise in Iranian influence over Iraqi affairs as the major, if unintended, consequence of the overthrow of the Ba’athist regime. The result has been deep suspicion of Iran’s cultivation of extensive ties with both state and non-state actors inside Iraq, which have provided Teheran with strategic depth and stoked deep unease within the GCC (Carpenter and Innocent 2007: 47).

It is in this context that the theory of a ‘Shiite crescent’ running from Iran through Iraq and the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia to Lebanon gained considerable traction in popular and political discourse in the region (Yamani 2006: 8). This occurred as the orgy of political violence and subnational communalistic challenges to state authority between 2005 and 2007 sharpened sectarian tensions in the Gulf, as in the broader Middle East. It negatively affected the pace of political reform by reinforcing the innate conservatism of the ruling families in the GCC, who interpreted the unfolding chaos in Iraq as proof that US-backed democratization efforts would shift the locus of power away from the regime (Toensing 2007: 47).

⁸ For example, see the negative reaction in the Gulf to US Secretary of Defense Robert Gate’s proposal in December 2008 that the GCC consider expanding to include Iraq: GCC Rules out Expansion to Include Iraq, *Gulf Daily News*, 14 December 2008; personal interview, Kuwait, 21 December 2008.

⁹ Quoted in Nawaf Obaidi, Stepping into Iraq: Saudi Arabia Will Protect Sunnis if the US Leaves, *Washington Post*, 29 November 2006; Obaidi was removed from his position as a private security advisor to the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Washington, DC, Prince Turki al-Faisal, following the publication of this op-ed article in which he called for massive Saudi intervention to stop Iranian-backed Shiite militias from butchering Iraqi Sunnis if US forces withdrew prematurely from Iraq following the Democrats victory in the 2006 congressional mid-term elections.

Theories of a ‘Shiite crescent’ and suspicion that Shiite parties represent a threat to Gulf Arab polities are ahistorical. They rest on a flawed ascription of pan-Shiite transnational loyalties and an assumption of monolithic unity within Shiism itself, and a simplistic narrative of sectarian conflict and minority identities (Louer 2008a: 223). Iraqi Shiites are divided and most hold a more complex and positive attachment to Iraqi nationalism than is admitted by proponents of a ‘Shiite crescent’ (Visser 2007: 23). Kuwaiti Shiites demonstrated their loyalty to the state during the 1990–1 occupation when their associational infrastructure provided the backbone of an organized resistance movement against the Iraqi invaders (Meyer et al. 2007: 300). Significant Shiite unrest in Saudi Arabia in 1979 and Bahrain between 1994 and 1999 was motivated by resentment at uneven patterns of development and internal socio-economic marginalization rather than residual loyalties or direct or indirect Iranian influence (Fakhro 1997: 183, Jones 2006: 213).

Nevertheless, the sectarian lens remains a powerful filter through which ruling elites in the GCC view developments in Iraq. In states with significant Shiite populations, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait, the potential overspill of sectarian violence and its threat to their domestic security was instrumental in shaping regimes’ engagement with the new government in Baghdad. Led by Saudi Arabia, GCC rulers deeply distrusted the Maliki government, which they suspected was an Iranian proxy and a source of multiple physical and ideational threats to their own polities (Sager 2008). This contributed to a self-fulfilling cycle as their reluctance to increase their political and economic engagement with Iraq enabled Iran to take the lead in reconstruction and development projects.¹⁰ These include the new international airport in Najaf which opened in August 2008, the creation of a free trade zone around Basra, and the signing of multiple cooperation agreements between Iraq and Iran (Katzman 2008: 6).

A slew of unresolved issues such as the slow incorporation of the Awakening Councils into state structures and the controversial creation of tribal Support Councils continue to complicate the confidence of GCC state elites in the Maliki government.¹¹ The centralization of political and military power in the Prime Minister’s Office and creation of a shadow network of advisers bypassing official government structures

¹⁰ US Wants Gulf States to Impose Curbs on Iran, *Khaleej Times*, 14 December 2008.

¹¹ Personal interview, Kuwait, 22 December 2008; Tariq Alhomayed, Betraying The Awakening Council, *Asharq Alawsat*, 24 August 2008; Alissa J. Rubin, Clash over Tribal Councils Intensifies in Iraq, *International Herald Tribune*, 4 December 2008.

carries ominous overtones of Iraq's dictatorial past (Dodge 2008: 41). Another important source of regional concern is the decentralization debate and competing initiatives to create a federal entity in southern Iraq.¹² From the point of view of GCC rulers, the most worrying aspect of the federalism issue lies in its normative and practical implications for the highly centralized concentration of power in their own states. Particularly in Saudi Arabia, the legitimacy of the ruling family elite rests on a narrow Nejdī–Wahhabi alliance which may become vulnerable to contestation from groups and communities excluded and marginalized during the process of state formation, including Shiites in the Eastern Province, Ismailis in Asir and Hijazis in western Arabia (Gause 2009: 2).

Iraq therefore remains a perceived source of insecurities and tension to the GCC. It is important to note that the nature of the threat has changed, as Iraq is unlikely to pose a hard military threat in the foreseeable future, although Kuwait remains wary of any transfer of offensive weaponry to the Iraqi armed forces.¹³ New threats to regional instability come from the continuing lack of human development and indices of human insecurity in Iraq, such as the 2.3 million internally displaced persons and high rates of poverty and unemployment (UNAMI 2007). These factors will continue to act as agents of instability so long as they remain unresolved. Transnational criminal networks and the growth of an illicit economy have already emerged as Iraq has become an increasingly lucrative conduit in the global drugs trade (INCB 2008). Since 2003, smugglers have taken advantage of porous border controls to channel illegal opiates, cannabis and synthetic pharmaceuticals from Afghanistan via Iran to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for onward transit to Europe.¹⁴

The ideational and military challenge from Iran

The potency of the 'Shiite crescent' discourse underscores the complex web of political, economic and historical interconnections which criss-cross the Gulf and influence the different ways in which individual GCC states view their relationship with Iran. Whereas the United States depicts Iran as a strategic rival and military threat to its interests in the GCC, ruling elites in the Gulf states focus more on the ideational and political threats emanating from Teheran (Chubin 2009: 165). Iran has

¹² For information on the progress of the initiatives to create federal entities in southern Iraq see the website maintained by Dr Reidar Visser at www.historia.org (last accessed 2 January 2009).

¹³ Personal interview, Kuwait, 22 December 2008; US Arms to Iraq Worry Kuwait, *Gulf Times*, 23 September 2008.

¹⁴ Iraq Emerging as Key Route in Global Drugs Trade, Agence France-Presse, 5 July 2008.

presented both material and ideational threats to its neighbours in the past. It maintained a longstanding claim on Bahrain until 1970 and periodically revives the issue, most recently in July 2007 and February 2009 (Louis 2003: 98).¹⁵ It has occupied three islands belonging to Sharjah and Ras al-Khaymah (now part of the United Arab Emirates) since 1971 (Stracke 2008). After 1979, Teheran also attempted to export its Islamic revolution to neighbouring states with large Shiite populations as Iranian agents were implicated in plots to destabilize internal security in Bahrain (1981), Saudi Arabia (1984) and Kuwait (1985, and again during the ‘tanker war’ of 1987–8) (Gause 1994: 90).

This legacy of Iranian ambitions to attain regional hegemony, alongside the presence of substantial Shiite communities in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, have tied the external threat posed by Iran to issues of internal security within the GCC. As the threat of sectarian overspill from Iraq became securitized by ruling elites between 2005 and 2007, local discourse on the nature of the Shiite threat often conflated questions of Shiite loyalties and Iranian meddling into one amorphous threat (Jones 2005: 25). Particularly in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, officials feared the politicization of Shiite communities and sought to delegitimize and deflect their demands for participation and inclusion by restricting political spaces available to them and depicting activists as potential fifth columnists with allegiance to Iran.¹⁶

The perceived ideational threat from Iran is compounded by the GCC states’ bilateral integration into the US security umbrella. This reliance on external protection is a continuation of a much older strategy of survival against regional predators.¹⁷ However, it enmeshes the GCC states within the broader political and ideological conflict between the United States and Iran. Successive US administrations since the 1979 Iranian revolution have refused to accept that Iran can play a constructive role in any regional security system. Meanwhile Iran has consistently called for the departure of all foreign forces from the Gulf as the *sine qua non* of any such agreement (Halliday 2005: 152).

Such a binary opposition of competing visions of regional security exposes the GCC to great risks should tensions between Iran and the international community

¹⁵ Zaki Taleb, *The Iranian Policy in the Gulf Is Indeed Puzzling, because This Policy Is Rife with Contraventions*, *Arab Times*, 21 July 2007; Habib Toumi, *Iran ‘Ignorant of International Laws’*, *Gulf News*, 16 February 2009.

¹⁶ Personal interview, Bahrain, 19 December 2008.

¹⁷ Between 1835 and 1971 this role was performed by the government of India and (after 1947) the United Kingdom.

over its nuclear programme escalate significantly. The scale and extent of GCC military ties with the United States renders their legitimacy acutely vulnerable to blowback from Iranian retaliatory strikes and enraged public opinion which would likely hold their regimes complicit in any such strike (Anthony et al. 2008: 4). This forms part of the broader 'regimes-peoples' division within Middle Eastern states, which became identifiable during Israel's conflicts with Hizbollah in 2006 and Hamas in 2008–9 (Valbjorn and Bank 2007: 3). Within the Gulf, the staunch public opposition to US policies in Iraq and Afghanistan and ties to Israel presents a range of ideational fault lines which Iran has already started to exploit in an effort to detach GCC states from the bellicose rhetoric emanating from Washington DC.

During 2008, Iran escalated a war of words designed to leave the GCC states in no doubt of its intention to destabilize their polities in the event of conflict. In summer 2008, the deputy foreign minister, Manouchehr Mohammadi, pointedly questioned the legitimacy of the monarchies and traditional systems in the Arabian Peninsula and speculated that they would not be able to quell rising domestic unrest at the US military presence.¹⁸ In September the defence minister, Mostafa Mohamed Najjar, warned Gulf regimes that 'Our response to any attack would be decisive ... We are certain the countries of the region would prevent America from attacking Iran.'¹⁹ In the same month the ideological threat posed by Iran to the internal security of GCC states became more acute when Teheran handed responsibility for defending the Gulf in the event of any attack to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.²⁰

This decision was announced one day after a former Iranian consul-general to Dubai gave an interview to the Dubai-based *Gulf News*, claiming that Iran had maintained a network of sleeper cells in the GCC since 1979 which could be activated to destabilize on Teheran's orders. Adel al-Assadi, who defected in 2001, predicted that 'Teheran has enough manpower to destabilize the GCC countries' and added that 'the practice of recruiting agents in the Gulf is deeply rooted in the way the intelligence institution is operating and is considered a strong point for Iran'.²¹ Iranian officials publicly repudiated the allegations and accused the Western media of spreading lies about Iranian intentions. Nevertheless, the effect of these rumours and

¹⁸ Senior Iran Official Predicts Imminent Demise of Gulf State Royals, *World Tribune* (Nicosia), 15 August 2008.

¹⁹ Iran Dismisses Gulf Sleeper Cell 'Lies', *Gulf Times*, 17 September 2008.

²⁰ Iran Boasts Its Forces Can Control the Gulf, Agence France-Presse, 17 September 2008.

²¹ Defector Accuses Iran of Running Sleeper Cells in Gulf, Agence France-Presse, 16 September 2008.

the recurrent revival of claims to Bahrain as ‘Iran’s fourteenth governorate’ do fuel regime suspicions about Iranian intentions and capabilities.²² More importantly, they tap into a widely held feeling in the GCC at both political and public levels that Iran maintains a network of undercover agents in the Gulf which could and would engage in underhand tactics if ordered to do so from Teheran.²³

All six GCC states worry to varying degrees over Iranian influence, even as they maintain extensive trading links with Iran which, in the case of re-export trade from Dubai to Iran, constitutes a major loophole in the international regime of economic and financial sanctions.²⁴ Ties of trade and shared commercial interests provide a powerful rationale for improving relations between the GCC and Iran. However, the different internal calculations within each individual state mean that the GCC is unable to reach consensus on, or deal collectively with, the Iranian issue at a regional multilateral level.²⁵ The diversity of opinions and approaches was clearly evidenced in December 2007 when the Qatari leadership invited President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad to become the first Iranian leader to address a GCC summit in December 2007. Perhaps emblematically, this caused more discord than goodwill, as Qatar did not consult the other GCC leaders before extending the invitation. Ahmedinejad subsequently embarrassed his hosts by ignoring issues of GCC concern, such as the nuclear programme or the UAE islands dispute, while renewing his call for regional security cooperation on the unspoken assumption that this would be on Iranian terms (Partrick 2008).

Transnational insecurity and the contraction of state control in Yemen

Radical extremism and transnational terrorism pose a different, but no less profound, ideational threat to regime legitimacy and internal security. Security officials throughout the GCC notably failed to anticipate the rise of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula after 2002, but quickly realized that the organization’s publicized aim of forcing the withdrawal of Western forces and influence from the peninsula constituted an existential challenge to regime legitimacy (Riedel and Saab 2008: 44).²⁶ In February 2006 the failed attack on the oil processing facility at Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia had been intended to strike at the heart of the social and commercial contract

²² Bahrain Halts Gas Talks with Iran over Row, *Khaleej Times*, 18 February 2008.

²³ Iran Dismisses Gulf Sleeper Cell ‘Lies’, *Gulf Times*, 17 September 2008.

²⁴ Sanctions Slow Iran’s Trade, but Not Stop, Associated Press, 18 August 2008.

²⁵ Personal interview, Kuwait, 27 May 2008.

²⁶ Personal interview, Kuwait, 21 December 2008.

binding GCC regimes to their societies and to the international community (Koch 2006: 22). The construction of a radical alternative to governing elites attempted to tap and mobilize popular discontent at their pro-Western orientation. The depth of such feelings within Gulf polities became clear in unpublished Saudi polls showing that 95 per cent of young males (aged 25–41) sympathized with Osama bin Laden in 2001 and that 97 per cent opposed any form of cooperation with the US-led attack on Iraq in 2003 (Schwarz 2007: 124; Furtig 2007: 638).

The ICT revolution and the creation of new forms of virtual space have eroded regimes' control over the flow of information and made it harder for them to isolate their societies from external influences (Murphy 2008: 184). The simultaneous rise of satellite television, the Internet and email has enabled transnational organizations to spread their messages across state boundaries and appeal to a broad 'imagined community' of followers (Kaldor et al. 2003: 29). The introduction of the Internet into Saudi Arabia early in 1999 played a pivotal role in facilitating the spread of jihadist propaganda in the kingdom (Hegghammer 2008: 708). Saudi security officials responded to this unprecedented ideational challenge by prioritizing 'intellectual security' and actively adopting cyber countermeasures in an effort to do battle with 'deviant thoughts' and turn the ICT weapon against their foes.²⁷

Although the current capability of terrorist organizations in the Arabian Peninsula is much diminished, their intent remains a real threat to the internal security and external stability of the GCC states. In spite of the active Saudi counter-terror campaign, jihadist websites continue to spread their messages and facilitate communications between different groups.²⁸ Terrorist finances have not been completely disrupted and remain a threat, particularly in Dubai, which is emerging as one of the new conduits for organized transnational criminal and terrorist networks (Davidson 2008: 277). Moreover the April 2008 suicide bombing carried out in Mosul by Abdullah al-'Aini, a recent Kuwaiti returnee from Guantánamo Bay, indicated that many extremists remain beyond rehabilitation.²⁹ Regional security officials acknowledge that the return of foreign insurgents from Iraq will inject a new dynamic into the regional security environment and remain a latent risk for many years to come (Schwarz 2007: 125).

²⁷ Imams Fail in their Desired Roles: Naif, *Arab News*, 17 October 2008.

²⁸ Personal interview, London, 10 July 2008.

²⁹ Kuwaiti Militant Says Iran Supports Sunni Fighters in Iraq, *Kuwait Times*, 8 May 2008.

In January 2009 the emergence of two Saudi returnees from Guantánamo in positions of leadership in Al-Qaeda in Yemen highlighted the weaknesses in regional and international security responses to the challenge of transnational terrorism. Following their release from Guantánamo, Saud al-Shihri and Muhammad al-Awfi spent five months in Saudi Arabia's much-vaunted rehabilitation and counter-radicalization programmes and were deemed ready for reintegration into society in May 2008.³⁰ Their reappearance in Yemen struck a humiliating and damaging blow to the counterterrorism strategy of Saudi Arabia, which had presented this soft approach and emphasis on a 'war of ideas' as an innovative new strategy in the struggle against violent extremism (Boucek 2008: 3). Meanwhile the link with Yemen adds weight to growing evidence that extremists and groups linked to Al-Qaeda have reconstituted themselves there after their tactical and operational defeat in Saudi Arabia.

The contraction of government control and existence of 'ungoverned' spaces in Yemen further illustrates the complex interconnections between internal and external security in the GCC. Saudi Arabia and other GCC states face a renewed challenge from terrorist infiltration and weapons smuggling from Yemen as terror cells take advantage of state contraction and security gaps to regroup and reorganize (Rabasa 2007). In May 2008, Yemen's vice-president, Abdu-Rabu Mansour Hadji, claimed that 16,000 suspected members of the Al-Qaeda network had been expelled from Yemen since 2003. This figure included many 'Arab Afghan' who had fled Afghanistan for Saudi Arabia following the overthrow of the Taliban regime and then moved to Yemen to avoid capture by Saudi security forces.³¹

These arrests notwithstanding, in August Yemeni security forces uncovered an Al-Qaeda-linked cell which was planning to attack targets in Saudi Arabia, and later foiled a separate Yemeni-led cell which aimed to target oil installation facilities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.³² This plot was reminiscent of Al-Qaeda's failed attack in February 2006 on the Abqaiq oil processing facility, and it highlighted the vulnerability to infiltration of Saudi Arabia's lengthy 1,800-km boundary with Yemen.³³ Internal Saudi Arabian political and regional fault lines may also become more susceptible to fragmentation as the three south-western provinces of Asir,

³⁰ Robert F. Worth, Freed by the US, Saudi Becomes a Qaeda Chief, *New York Times*, 22 January 2009.

³¹ Yemen Expelled 16,000 Foreign Al-Qaeda Suspects: Vice President, Qatar News Agency, 16 June 2008.

³² Saleh Informs Sultan of Al-Qaeda Plots Uncovered in Yemen, *Arab News*, 14 August 2008.

³³ Saudi Arabia To Try 1,200 More Terror Suspects, *Saudi Gazette*, 26 October 2008.

Najran and Jizan have been marginalized from much of the wealth redistribution in Saudi Arabia and retain cross-border familial, economic and social ties with Yemen (Okruhlik 1999: 300).

The 17 September 2008 coordinated assault on the US embassy compound in Sana'a, the Yemeni capital, which killed ten people revealed a disturbing new development, as three of the six suicide attackers had recently returned from Iraq.³⁴ After their return, the men reportedly attended Al-Qaeda camps in the southern provinces of Hadramawt and Marib, which Yemeni security officials suspect of training an aggressive new generation of extremist leaders (Sharp 2008). The deteriorating internal security situation in Yemen, at once a cause and consequence of the contraction of state control, is a significant threat to the stability of the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, it links regional security in the Arabian Peninsula to another security subregion in the Horn of Africa. This brings into the regional security equation the problems of state collapse in Somalia and progressive state contraction in Yemen, large-scale refugee flows from Somalia to Yemen and the burgeoning issue of piracy in the Gulf of Aden (Hill 2008: 11).³⁵ Disturbing evidence of the threat to the security of the Arabian Peninsula from this axis surfaced in March 2009 with the news that a Yemeni suicide bomber who killed four South Korean tourists in Yemen had trained in Somalia before returning to carry out his attack at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shibam.³⁶

The involvement of militants from the Iraqi insurgency raises the prospect of a second destabilizing wave of combat-hardened militants returning to the Arabian Peninsula. In 2002, the first wave of several hundred Saudi 'Afghan veterans' returned to Saudi Arabia following the fall of Kandahar and provided the nuclei for the terrorist campaign waged by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2003–4 (Riedel and Saab 2008: 34). Although the security forces in Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states are better prepared to handle the return of 'Iraq veterans', and are unlikely to be taken by surprise as they were in 2002, their counterterrorism measures

³⁴ Yemen Identifies US Embassy Attackers, *Gulf Today*, 2 November 2008.

³⁵ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 32,000 refugees fled Somalia for Yemen between January and October 2008 and that Yemen housed more than 75,000 Somali refugees, while the International Maritime Bureau reported that at least 83 ships had been attacked in the Gulf of Aden in the same period, and 33 hijacked.

³⁶ Bomber behind Yemen Attack Trained in Somalia, Reuters, 18 March 2009.

may simply be shifting the problem to the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula instead.³⁷

The rising incidence of terrorism in Yemen is a symptom of the much broader crisis of governance and erosion of state capacity which is facing the country and its long-serving president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. It is one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, with a population of 23 million (the second highest in the Arabian Peninsula, after Saudi Arabia) and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2007 of just \$2,500.³⁸ The Saleh government faces a combination of armed rebellion, deep-seated socio-economic problems and mass opposition to government policies.³⁹ The cumulative impact of poor governance and endemic corruption, inadequate economic development, dwindling oil reserves and a water table dropping by 10 feet per year, poverty and unemployment rates of over 40 per cent and rapid population growth of 3.7 per cent per annum is a systemic social and economic crisis which has left Yemen perilously close to collapsing into a failed state (Day 2008: 431).

In the northern province of Sa'ada, tribesmen from the Shiite Zaydi sect have fought running battles with state security forces in a rebellion which has claimed thousands of lives since September 2004. An upsurge in the fighting in summer 2008 saw more than 100,000 refugees flow into camps in and around the regional capital. The International Committee of the Red Cross issued a humanitarian warning over the shattered civilian infrastructure and shortages of food and water in the area.⁴⁰ Meanwhile in southern Yemen the refugee flows from Somalia have added to the strain on these scarce resources, while in March 2008 mass protests at government economic policies erupted into widespread urban rioting which were only quelled by a repressive security crackdown (Sharp 2008).

This failing political economy on the south-western flank of the Arabian Peninsula is a direct threat to the security and stability of the GCC.⁴¹ Concerted regional and international action is necessary to assist the Yemeni state infrastructure to cope with the growing gap between rising demands for, and diminishing supplies of, basic services and resources. However, by early 2009 neither the international community nor the GCC had formulated a collective long-term strategy to prevent

³⁷ Personal interview, London, 10 July 2008.

³⁸ Figures taken from the CIA World Factbook 2008, at www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html (last accessed 3 January 2009).

³⁹ Intissar Fakir, *The Ignored Causes of Yemeni Instability*, *Daily Star*, 25 August 2008.

⁴⁰ *Yemenis Need Help to Recover from Fighting* – ICRC, Reuters, 13 November 2008.

⁴¹ Telephone interview, Dubai, 14 December 2008.

Yemen from collapsing into a failed state (Sharp 2008). What is lacking is a programme of political and economic engagement that goes beyond countering terrorism and tackles the root causes of state failure and societal strains.

A major part of the problem is that the GCC is unable to reach a consensus on how to tackle the instability in Yemen and what measures to take to alleviate it.⁴² Lingering resentments with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia hamper efforts to incorporate Yemen into regional structures.⁴³ At a collective level, the GCC fears for its labour security if its labour markets are opened up to an anticipated large-scale influx of low-skilled and politicized labour migrants from Yemen.⁴⁴ Instead, neighbouring states Saudi Arabia and Oman have adopted measures such as tighter border controls and security fences in attempts to contain the tensions within Yemen and prevent overspill to their own polities.⁴⁵ The thwarting of terror plots directed by Yemenis against targets in Saudi Arabia may indicate the immediate success of this policy of containment. However, it fails to offer a long-term solution to Yemen's systemic problems of governance and resource depletion which will become more acute with time.⁴⁶

The dynamic interaction between internal and external events is the thread running through formulation of security policy by the ruling elites within the GCC. The postcolonial state system has survived three major interstate wars since 1980, while a genuine attachment to national symbols and sense of belonging has grafted the substance of group identity on to the impersonal framework of the state (Dresch 2005: 11). Nevertheless, the emergence of 'new' transnational security issues and shifting patterns of conflict from interstate to intra-societal violence introduces new challenges to regional security (Kelstrup 2004: 109; Kaldor 2007: 32). The impact of the processes of globalization on state–society relations and societal insecurity needs to be examined in the specific context of evolving political economies and domestic structural problems in the GCC, to which this paper now turns.

⁴² Personal interview, Qatar, 16 December 2008.

⁴³ In 1990 Saudi Arabia expelled 800,000 Yemenis from the kingdom, while Kuwait has yet fully to forgive Yemen's support for Iraq during the 1990–1 occupation, in spite of the large sums of aid distributed to Yemen by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

⁴⁴ Personal interview, Qatar, 16 December 2008.

⁴⁵ Christopher Sell, Riyadh Awards \$900m Border Fence Deal, *Middle East Economic Digest*, 20 June 2008.

⁴⁶ The 2008 BP *Statistical Review of World Energy* puts Yemen's oil reserves–production ratio at 22.3 years. However, Hill (2008: 7) cites a World Bank prediction that state revenues from oil and gas sales will reach zero by 2017.

EVOLVING AND LONGER-TERM CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL SECURITY

The second half of this paper focuses on evolving and longer-term challenges to security in the Gulf states. These include stunted political reform projects, demographic trends and structural imbalances in Gulf polities, the political economy of resource distribution, and the impact of environmental degradation and climate change. Changing political economies and a range of socio-economic problems are straining traditional channels of state–society interaction and complicating traditional strategies for co-opting potential opponents through the spread of wealth (Nonneman 2000: 108). If left unchecked or inadequately tackled, these issues have the potential to strike at the heart of the social contract and redistributive mechanisms which bind state and society, and leave a legacy of fractured polities with greater susceptibility to future external and global threats to security from issues such as climate change.

Stunted political reform processes

Beginning with the accession to power of a new generation of rulers in Qatar (1995) and Bahrain (1999), the GCC states began a process of political reforms aimed at updating traditional channels of state–society interaction and introducing a participatory dimension and measure of political pluralism. These included a new constitution and bicameral National Assembly in Bahrain in 2002; the introduction of municipal elections in Qatar in 1999 and a new constitution in 2003; provision for direct elections to the Majlis ash-Shura in Oman in 2000 and universal suffrage in 2003; expansion of the Majlis ash-Shura and the holding of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia in 2005; the enfranchisement of women in Kuwait in 2005; and very limited elections to the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates in 2006 (Nonneman 2008: 9–13).

These reforms amounted to an exercise in political decompression designed to renew the legitimacy of ruling elites and co-opt oppositional groups in a carefully managed, top-down process of incremental change (Ehteshami and Wright 2007: 915). Although no two pathways to reform are identical, as of 2008 none met Ottaway’s definition of a ‘political paradigm shift’ governing relations between state and society and the location of the source, distribution and exercise of political power (Ottaway 2005: 6). Government-directed control has persisted and, with the partial exception of Kuwait, the balance of political power remains vested in the ruling families and their neo-patrimonial networks (Al-Naqeeb 2006: 134).

One danger facing Gulf elites and society alike is that dashed expectations of meaningful reforms may generate disillusionment with, and disengagement from, the political process if it is seen merely to cloak an old emperor in new clothes. This is already happening in Bahrain. The major Shiite political groups such as Al-Wefaq face increasing pressure to demonstrate to their constituents that their decision to participate in the 2006 National Assembly elections (following their boycott in 2002) has produced any tangible benefits (Burke 2008: 7). It is noteworthy that disillusionment with the political process in Bahrain extends beyond Islamist groups to secular left-wing political associations such as the National Democratic Action Society, which hinted in September 2008 that it and other oppositional groups were prepared to boycott the next elections in 2010.⁴⁷

A different set of problems arises from the systemic flaws and unresolved tensions within the Kuwaiti political system. These have produced a succession of political crises⁴⁸ arising from the constant confrontation between the opposition-controlled parliament and the government and arising from splits within the ruling Al-Sabah family itself (Brown 2008: 2). A major structural weakness is the absence of political parties and a parliamentary support base for government policies.⁴⁹ The political paralysis which ensues is harmful to the long-term evolution of GCC polities in two ways. First, it delays vital legislation aimed at economic diversification⁵⁰ and political maturation⁵¹ in Kuwait itself and, second, it reinforces negative perceptions of the democratic process among ruling families elsewhere in the GCC, who are mindful of the consequences of allowing too much participation in decision-making processes (Salem 2007: 17).

Saudi Arabia is the linchpin of the GCC, and the path of political and economic evolution in the kingdom will have profound consequences for the smaller Gulf states on its periphery.⁵² Ossified state structures and fiercely competitive and overlapping bureaucratic fiefdoms act as a powerful brake on the processes of

⁴⁷ Boycott of 2010 Poll Likely, Says Bahraini Society, *Bahrain Tribune*, 11 September 2008.

⁴⁸ Including the dissolution of parliament in May 2006 and March 2008 and the resignation of the cabinet in November 2008 in order to head off demands by three members of parliament to question the prime minister.

⁴⁹ Personal interview, Kuwait, 21 December 2008.

⁵⁰ Examples include a financial regulations bill which has been repeatedly delayed, and parliamentary opposition to the creation of a \$17.4 billion joint venture between Dow Chemicals and a Kuwaiti petrochemicals company which led to the deal being scrapped in December 2008.

⁵¹ For example, parliamentary opposition to the Emir's decree on female enfranchisement in 1999.

⁵² Personal interview, Bahrain, 18 December 2008.

incremental reform currently under way in the kingdom (Hertog 2007: 555). The performance of traditional networks of patronage and wealth redistribution is being challenged by the socio-economic challenges of high unemployment and population growth.⁵³ Existing power networks are less able to use oil rents to respond effectively to societal demands for a more equitable distribution of wealth (Yamani 2008: 149). The task facing the Al-Saud is thus to identify and address the problems of incomplete modernization and ensure that change is incremental and progressive rather than sudden, violent and radical.

Political evolution is by definition an incremental process, stretching over years and decades. The reforms initiated in the late 1990s and early 2000s have created some political space for new actors to emerge. Conditions-based enmeshment in layers of global governance through membership of organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the International Labour Organization is another factor in the opening up of the political economies of the GCC (Held and McGrew 2000: 35). However, the partial political reforms have laid the foundations for longer-term conflicts over the locus of power and the direction of future change in Gulf polities, particularly between regimes and the Islamist opposition groups which have emerged as their primary challengers in the absence of formal political parties and ideologically based alternatives (Brumberg 2003: 12). This opens a potential challenge to regime legitimacy at a time of growing socio-economic strains which will primarily affect a generation of young people who lack any experience of pre-oil hardships and take for granted the redistribution of wealth and provision of public goods (Longva 2004: 34).

Demographic trends and structural imbalances

Socio-economic strains may therefore have a particularly destabilizing effect on the large numbers of young people who lack any point of comparison with the hardships experienced by their elders. The enormous capital accumulation during the 2003–8 oil price boom masks growing disparities of wealth which have created a new underclass of ‘have-nots’, as evidenced by the more than halving of income per capita in Saudi Arabia between 1980 (\$16,650) and 2000 (\$7,239) (Dresch 2005: 16). Current levels of welfare expenditure and redistributive mechanisms are unsustainable in the longer

⁵³ More than 30 per cent of Saudi citizens between the ages of 16 and 25 are reportedly unemployed. N. Janardhan, *Economic Diversification and Knowledge Economy in the Gulf*, paper delivered to the Gulf Studies Conference, University of Exeter, 3 July 2008.

term and will require a reformulation of the social contract through the introduction of charges for basic services such as water and electricity.⁵⁴ Such an outcome is not palatable to ruling elites, who, in the words of one retired Kuwaiti official, are ‘scared like hell’ at the possible social tensions and instability which they fear might result from the scaling back of subsidies and introduction of charges.⁵⁵ This innate caution was evidenced in Dubai in March 2008, when a water tariff which was introduced for expatriates was not extended to citizens of the United Arab Emirates (Raouf 2009: 8).

Rapid population growth and inadequate employment opportunities are major threats to long-term stability and security in the GCC. The Gulf states contain one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world. The Population Reference Bureau estimates that GCC populations will increase by between 42 per cent and 80 per cent in each country to 2050, and by 151 per cent in Yemen.⁵⁶ Its statistics for 2008 also show a large youth bulge as the proportion of the population under 24 varies from 19 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 24 per cent in Kuwait (figures roughly comparable to the United Kingdom) to 38 per cent in Saudi Arabia and 45 per cent in Yemen, the two most populous states in the region.⁵⁷ These figures place significant pressures on Gulf regimes to generate sufficient jobs to accommodate them as they work their way through the labour market in coming decades (Cordesman 2008: 100).

This challenge is compounded by stratified labour markets and rentier mentalities which have created imbalanced labour forces riven by numerous fault lines. These include divisions between men and women, the public and private sectors, citizen and expatriate labour, and people able to work and communicate in English and the rest (Bahgat 1999: 129). The existence of large numbers of migrant labourers with no civil or political rights and very few economic rights is itself a source of human insecurity and a potential threat to Gulf polities should they make

⁵⁴ Personal interview, Qatar, 16 December 2008.

⁵⁵ Personal interview, Kuwait, 22 December 2008.

⁵⁶ The breakdown of the figures for projected population growth in each individual country between 2008 and 2050 are: Kuwait 80 per cent, Oman 42 per cent, Qatar 48 per cent, Saudi Arabia 77 per cent, United Arab Emirates 75 per cent and Yemen 151 per cent: www.prb.org/Datafinder/Geography/MultiCompare.aspx?variables=30®ions=122,128,130,131,132,135,137 (accessed 12 January 2008).

⁵⁷ www.prb.org/Datafinder/Geography/MultiCompare.aspx?variables=35®ions=122,128,130,131,132,135,137 (accessed 12 January 2008).

any such claims to civil or political rights in the future.⁵⁸ Continuing reliance on expatriate labour at a time of growing indigenous unemployment also contains the seeds of considerable future discontent.⁵⁹ Within the region unemployment is regularly cited as the major long-term challenge facing regimes which are widely perceived to lack the political courage and capital to formulate effective strategies for tackling the structural roots of the labour imbalance.⁶⁰

A November 2007 study by McKinsey & Company laid bare the scale of the challenge posed by mounting unemployment in the GCC. The report estimated that real unemployment rates in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia exceeded 15 per cent and that the figure rose to 35 per cent in the 16–24 age bracket. It also found that the saturated public sector was no longer able to guarantee employment to citizens entering the job market. Furthermore, it identified severe deficiencies in local education systems which meant that most entrants into labour markets lacked the qualifications to enter the private sector.⁶¹ These contradictions in regional labour markets are a feature common to all GCC countries but are most extreme in Kuwait, where nationals made up a mere 1.8 per cent of the private-sector workforce in 2004, compared with about 10 per cent in Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates and about 30 per cent in Saudi Arabia (Saif 2009: 17).

These results confirmed the findings of an earlier study commissioned in 2004 by Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, the crown prince of Bahrain. This predicted that unemployment would reach 35 per cent by 2013, by which time the number of Bahraini nationals within the labour market is expected to be double the 2003 level (Quilliam 2008: 94). In his capacity as chairman of the Economic Development Board, the Crown Prince has spearheaded economic reforms designed to tackle corruption, increase the opportunities available to young people, and encourage foreign investment and private-sector development.⁶² Many of these reforms were

⁵⁸ This may already be happening, as significant labour unrest occurred in Dubai, Bahrain and Kuwait during 2007–8. Roger Hardy, *Migrants Demand Labour Rights in Gulf*, BBC News, 27 February 2008.

⁵⁹ In 2007, 13,974,000 expatriates constituted 37.16 per cent of the total GCC population of 37,600,000 and a majority of the population in Kuwait (66 per cent), Qatar (75 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (83 per cent); see the introductory paper published by the LSE Kuwait Research Programme for Development, Governance and Globalisation by Sharon Shochat, *The Gulf Cooperation Council Economies: Diversification and Reform*, February 2008, p. 34, table 4.3.

⁶⁰ Telephone interview, Dubai, 14 December 2008; personal interview, Bahrain, 18 December 2008; personal interviews, Kuwait, 21 December 2008.

⁶¹ GCC Unemployment Rates Skyrocketing, *Bahrain Tribune*, 24 November 2007

⁶² Victoria Robson, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, Crown Prince of Bahrain, on Economic Reform, *Middle East Business Intelligence*, 22 February 2008.

held up by an internal power struggle within the ruling family between the Crown Prince and his conservative uncle, Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa (Wright 2008: 3). This seemed to have been resolved in the Crown Prince's favour in 2008, but the magnitude of socio-economic challenges facing Bahrain reduces the margin for future delays to the reform process.

These factors point to a future crisis in the social contract in its current guise of cradle-to-grave welfare for citizens. Existing state capacity to meet rising demand for utilities, health care and education, in addition to jobs, is overstretched, and the region has been hard hit by the double blow of plunging oil prices and the global economic downturn which started in 2008.⁶³ These have placed many development plans in jeopardy, including the four Economic Cities which form the core of Saudi Arabia's strategy of economic diversification and job creation.⁶⁴ In addition, diversification schemes have largely failed to resolve the deeper structural imbalances between public- and private-sector employment and the 'crisis of education'.⁶⁵ It risks marginalizing a generation of young people who lack the requisite skills sets and language abilities to compete with the alternative, cheaper sources of expatriate labour (Fandy 2007: 93).

Resource security and patterns of distribution

Issues of infrastructure security and access to basic services are a crucial component of long-term sustainability in the GCC states. Ensuring the security of access to sufficient food, water and energy supplies has a long-term strategic dimension, as it is crucial to meeting the challenges of rising population levels and large-scale economic diversification plans.⁶⁶ This is especially the case in instances in which intensive economic development leads to a rapid influx of expatriate labourers, as in Qatar, where the population almost doubled from 800,000 in 2006 to 1.5 million in 2007 (Richer 2008: 3). Water tables are dropping throughout the Middle East as demand from rapidly urbanizing and industrializing populations outstrips supply from fossil water and local aquifers. Moreover, a report issued by the Islamic Development Bank in November 2008 found that average annual water availability per capita in the

⁶³ Telephone interview, Qatar, 24 November 2008; Kuwait's Biggest Investment Bank Defaults on Debt, *Kuwait Times*, 9 January 2009.

⁶⁴ Melanie Lovatt, Questions Surround Implementation of Saudi Arabia's Economic Cities, 14 January 2009, <http://zawya.com/story.cfm/sidv52n02-1TS07>.

⁶⁵ The role of the private sector in Arab economic development was the main focus of the first Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit, which was held in Kuwait City on 19–20 January 2008.

⁶⁶ GCC Grid to Ensure Stable Power Supply, *The Peninsula*, 13 March 2009.

Middle East has declined by two-thirds since 1960 and is projected to halve again by 2050 to 550 cubic metres per capita per year. This will leave the region only slightly above the water scarcity threshold of 500 cubic metres per capita per year.⁶⁷

This has obvious implications for food security. This became clear in February 2008, when Saudi Arabia announced that it would cease producing grain by 2016 in order to alleviate growing water shortages attributed to climate change, drought and the depletion of fossil water.⁶⁸ Saudi officials have developed alternative plans to 'outsource' food production by creating an investment fund specifically to purchase agricultural land in Pakistan which will be used to meet domestic demands for rice and wheat.⁶⁹ Other Gulf states have negotiated similar partnerships with food-producing countries in Asia and Africa.⁷⁰ Such strategies are vital to ensuring food security and freeing scarce water resources for domestic and industrial consumption (Lillo 2008).

The steps being taken by GCC governments to procure sufficient food and free up water supplies are important in themselves. However, a more intractable problem in several GCC states comes from the interaction of dwindling natural resources with unequal patterns of resource distribution. The concentration of resources in one particular group while scarcities persist elsewhere has been a demonstrated source of civil strife in numerous instances (Homer-Dixon 2004: 269). Three examples from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain illustrate how localized scarcities and uneven access to resources can lead to domestic tensions and instability between ethnic, tribal or sectarian groups within society.

In November 1979, resentment among Shiite communities in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province at contracting water resources and failing water systems in the oases regions of Qatif and al-Hasa was a major cause of three days of clashes with Saudi security services. Tensions were exacerbated by protesters' anger at the apparent inability of local municipalities to alleviate the worsening situation. This tapped into currents of grievance at the broader marginalization of Shiite communities in Saudi

⁶⁷ IDB and UNSGAB Team Up to Support Water Sector in Arab Countries, press release, 23 November 2008, at www.isdb.org (accessed 15 January 2008).

⁶⁸ Andrew England and Javier Blas, Water Concerns Prompt Saudis to Cease Grain Production, *Financial Times*, 27 February 2008.

⁶⁹ Saudis Setting Up Fund to Buy Agricultural Land Abroad, *Gulf Times*, 26 August 2008.

⁷⁰ Examples include agreements or negotiations under way between Bahrain and Pakistan, Qatar and Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates and Kazakhstan.

Arabia and the politics of uneven development which denied basic services to the towns and villages in the Eastern Province (Jones 2006: 219).

Following the discovery of oil reserves in the Yemeni province of Hadramawt shortly after the 1990 reunification, oil rents under the control of northern patronage groups linked to President Saleh's powerful Hashid tribe fell disproportionately. Their exploitation of oil rents has caused widespread discontent in Hadramawt and other areas in southern Yemen with the political pattern laid down after the brief civil war in 1994. This played on and deepened lingering north-south tensions and was a contributory cause (although not the proximate one) of the large-scale urban protests against the government which took place in southern cities in 2007 and 2008 (Day 2008: 422).

The case of Bahrain illustrates the tensions which arise from differential levels of access to resources and employment. Economic deprivation and systemic government discrimination against the majority Shiite population formed the basis for recurrent internal unrest, most severely in the uprising from 1994 to 1999 (Peterson 2004: 1). In May 2008 the seventeen MPs belonging to Al-Wefaq walked out of a parliamentary debate to protest against the unexpected announcement of a 41 per cent increase in the population in 2007. This they alleged was due to government attempts to redress the sectarian balance on the islands by diluting the Shiite majority.⁷¹ The new arrivals also elicited cross-sectarian concern at the strain they place on services such as housing, education and the energy grid, which are already overstretched.⁷² Energy consumption doubled between 2006 and 2008 and is nearing peak capacity, yet demand for energy is forecast to grow by a further 65 per cent to 2014.⁷³

All three case studies demonstrate how states and societies containing numerous fault lines are more susceptible to internal tensions and conflict. Here the emphasis on 'regime security' becomes problematic as the issues of which group defines security, and for whom, become politicized and contested (Krause 1996: 324). This is evidenced by the controversy over the importing of Sunni families into Bahrain to staff the security and military services and its effect on sharpening state-

⁷¹ Bahrain Shia MPs Walk Out over Population Row, Reuters, 14 May 2008; this sudden announcement by the Central Bank in February 2008 followed years of concern at the Bahraini government's controversial programme of naturalizing more than 10,000 Sunni families from Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan to staff the security services, in which Bahraini Shiites are excluded from leadership positions.

⁷² Personal interviews, Bahrain, 18 December 2008.

⁷³ Bahrain's Energy Consumption Doubles in Two Years, *Bahrain Tribune*, 4 June 2008.

society conflict (Wright 2008: 9, Louer 2008b: 47). As described above, it may well contribute to the regime's sense of security but at the price of exacerbating sectarian fissures on the islands and corroding relations between the majority communities and the ruling elites.

Environmental degradation and climate change

Unequal resource distribution and socio-economic challenges such as poverty and population stresses may also increase a society's vulnerability to such external shocks as environmental degradation and climate change (P. J. Smith 2007: 624). Empirical research in other case studies has indicated that the impact of 'environmental scarcity' is most pernicious in instances where it interacts with systems of unequal resource distribution (Homer-Dixon 2004: 269). Societal cohesion may become fragmented if actual or latent fault lines and tensions within society become sharpened and dwindling access to limited resources becomes more contested. This is a potential issue of concern in the Gulf states where potential cleavages – whether Arab–Persian, Sunni–Shiite or citizen–non-citizen – abound.

Climate security and the threat from ecological disruption and human-induced climate change have emerged as a key component of the global security paradigm. In April 2007 the UN Security Council discussed for the first time the international security implications of climate change. It identified a range of security threats from climate change, including flows of environmental refugees, potential conflict over access to resources and energy supplies, and societal stresses and humanitarian crises (Eckersley 2008: 88). Other research has suggested that Middle Eastern countries will be among the hardest hit by climate change and that it could become the primary driver of conflict within and between states if comprehensive measures are not taken to alleviate its impact (Mabey 2008: 7).

Coastal patterns of settlement and development in Gulf states render them especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change or environmental degradation. Land reclamation projects and low-lying islands such as Bahrain would be impacted by rising sea levels.⁷⁴ In February 2009 the World Meteorological Organization warned that even a 5-cm rise in sea levels would have major consequences for marine life and coastal development. It added that rapid urbanization and land reclamation

⁷⁴ In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Third Assessment Report estimated that sea levels would rise by anything between 9 and 88 cm by 2100.

projects further increased the level of threat from natural disasters.⁷⁵ In Kuwait officials express deep anxiety about the potential environmental and ecological consequences of any accident at the Iranian nuclear reactor in Bushehr. They point out that Bushehr is closer to Kuwait than to Teheran and that counter-clockwise currents in the Gulf would result in Kuwait bearing the brunt of any irradiation of water supplies.⁷⁶ Desalination plants meet between 85 and 99 per cent of water requirements in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and their share in Saudi Arabia and Oman (currently 40–43 per cent) will increase as existing fossil water reserves become over-exploited and exhausted (Raouf 2009: 2). Thus any contamination of regional water supplies would be catastrophic.

Yet this aside, environmental degradation and climate change barely feature in regional security discourse. The Gulf states have some of the highest levels of per-capita energy consumption and per-capita carbon emissions in the world (Oxford Business Group 2008). In this context of heavy industrialization and mega-projects, the long-term threat from climate change is simply not an issue on the security agenda, which remains focused on short-term ‘hard’ issues. As one Dubai analyst said, ‘thinking is very ad hoc and short-term and this is the problem in the Gulf’.⁷⁷ The availability of information and public awareness of climate change and its mainstreaming into policymaking and implementation is virtually non-existent (Raouf 2008: 5). It remains to be seen whether UK Secretary of Defence John Hutton’s listing of climate change as one of the new threats to Gulf security (alongside the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorist havens in failed states) will have any discernible impact in the region.⁷⁸ Yet it remains the case that extreme weather events have been increasing significantly in the Middle East region, while the Gulf is projected to warm by between 3 and 5.9 degrees Celsius during the twenty-first century (Mitchell and Hulme 2000).

Once again, Yemen provides a stark example of how climate change and resource depletion is already sharpening tensions and exacerbating conflict over access to scarce resources. Water tables are dropping by as much as 6 to 10 ft each year, as the annual rains which replenish local aquifers cannot keep up with demand

⁷⁵ Climate Change Alert for Bahrain, *Gulf Daily News*, 17 February 2009.

⁷⁶ Personal interviews, Kuwait, 21 and 22 December 2008.

⁷⁷ Telephone interview, Dubai, 14 December 2008.

⁷⁸ Terrorism, Nuke Arms Spread, Climate Change Key Challenges in Gulf Region, Kuwait News Agency, 14 December 2008; Hutton was speaking at the Fifth IISS Manama Dialogue Regional Security Summit.

for water.⁷⁹ Growing scarcities have not resulted in better regulation of water management. Instead, individuals and groups have rushed to extract as much water as they can in order to translate it into short-term profits through growing qat. This mildly narcotic plant consumes more than two-thirds of annual water consumption in Yemen, and its cultivation is causing rapid soil depletion in addition to exacerbating the water scarcities.⁸⁰ It is here that the linkages drawn by Hutton between climate change, failing states and terrorism may combine in an interconnected cycle of instability and predatory contestation for resources in a contracting political economy.

CONCLUSION: A NEW APPROACH TO SECURITY?

The future of Gulf security will be framed by the need to find sustainable balances – between competing visions of the national and regional security architecture, between incremental reforms to political and economic structures and the deeper systemic problems which undermine long-term solutions, and between rising demands for, and falling supplies of, natural resources. At its core lies the balance between state and society and reformulation of the social contract during the transition to post-oil political economies. In this regard, the management of dwindling oil rents in Bahrain, Oman and Yemen will provide a barometer of the long-term prospects for internal security and external stability in the Arabian Peninsula.

States in transition are more vulnerable than most to political violence and ideational and other sub-state challenges to legitimacy. Visionary leadership and long-term development strategies are necessary, but not sufficient in themselves, to minimize these threats and reconstitute state–society relations. Socio-economic challenges and growing disparities of income and wealth within the GCC add further impetus to the need for regimes to broaden their base of support and construct more inclusive polities that can weather the transitions ahead. Redistributive states with depoliticized societies are especially vulnerable to economic insecurity and the potential breakdown of mechanisms for spreading wealth and co-opting support. For this reason, the global financial crisis and economic slowdown which began in 2007 has been very closely monitored by governments in the GCC.⁸¹ However, it remains

⁷⁹ Borzou Daragahi, In Yemen, a Race for Profit Is Hastening a Water Crisis, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 2008.

⁸⁰ Intissar Fakir, The Ignored Causes of Yemeni Instability, *Daily Star*, 25 August 2008.

⁸¹ Telephone interview, Qatar, 24 November 2008.

to be seen how serious regional initiatives to tackle the systemic structural problems which underlie many of the economic challenges in the region are.⁸²

What is vital to securing the sustainable long-term development of these polities is the expansion of their support base and the reconciliation of regime security with human security for all. This is crucial to strengthening the internal cohesion of Gulf polities and ensuring that current and future security strategies are targeted at all communities and levels of society. Tackling existing insecurities and inequalities will better enable states and societies to manage the transition to post-rentier forms of governance and lessen the sources of potential tension and violent contestation for political power. Empowering women and working towards human security for all communities increases the likelihood that changes will be consensual and non-violent.

References to gender and human security are entering regional debates on security with increasing frequency. Oman and Qatar, alongside the United Arab Emirates, have led the region in publicizing women's rights issues and placing women in visible positions of political and economic leadership. Prominent royals such as Sheikha Mozah of Qatar have taken on a leading role in educational and cultural development and are becoming more assertive in entering the public policy arena.⁸³ Similarly, in 2005 the Sultan of Oman appointed nine women to the fifty-eight-strong State Council (Majlis ad-dawla) as part of a strategy designed to change public perceptions of the position of women within society, create role models for future generations and give royal endorsement to the entry of women into public life (Jones and Ridout 2005: 390). In 2008 the United Arab Emirates' permanent representative at the United Nations told a Security Council debate on 'Women and Peace and Security' of his country's commitment to ensuring 'efficient and integrated participation of women in all efforts made to maintain and promote domestic peace and security in their communities, including effective participation in decision-making processes, mediation, reconciliation and negotiation'.⁸⁴

Simultaneously, groups and organizations have started to acknowledge the importance of human security as a foundation stone for constructing a new security paradigm. In 2008 the Arab Women's Organization themed its most recent biennial

⁸² Kuwaiti MPs Demand Citizen Debt Write-offs amid Crisis, Reuters, 12 February 2009; Kuwait Govt Bends to Backlash, *Kuwait Times*, 18 February 2009.

⁸³ As an example of Sheikha Moza's activism, see Protect Education from Crises: Sheikha Mozah, *The Peninsula*, 2 November 2008.

⁸⁴ UAE Calls for Women's Participation in the Protection of Peace and Security, Emirates News Agency, 1 November 2008.

conference on women and human security, and devoted the occasion to constructing a human security strategy which embraces women as equal participants and contributors.⁸⁵ The Arab Human Development Report 2008, to be published in 2009, will be entitled *Human Security in the Arab World* and will focus on the symbiosis of human development and human security. This is both significant and encouraging, as successive Arab Human Development Reports have identified the lag in key indices of human development, governance, and the political, economic and social realization of full empowerment in the Arab world.⁸⁶ A comprehensive approach to tackling the major underlying causes of the many social and economic challenges facing the GCC states would be a major step forward in formulating sustainable security strategies in the region.

It is possible that ruling elites in the GCC merely view their advocacy of the concept of human security as part of a broader strategy to update regime security and legitimacy. The adoption of the rhetoric of democratization in the late 1990s and early 2000s can be said to fit into this category, as it did not translate into substantive political reform.⁸⁷ If this proves to be the case it would fit into a record of pragmatic adoption of strategies of survival that have eased non-democratic regimes through periods of intense transition. These instincts have been finely honed over many decades and guided the regimes through the intense social and economic upheavals which accompanied the entry into the oil era (Kostiner 2000: 8). The primary differing variable in the shift to the post-oil future is that their capacity to co-opt opposition is likely to be limited both by socio-economic constraints and by globalizing flows of people, ideas and norms.

Much depends on the attitude of the ruling elites as agents of change. The top-down nature of reform processes in the GCC ensures that reforms are initiated and controlled by the state, at least in their early stages. Their actions will determine whether the reforms subsequently develop into a genuine commitment to the values of human security as applied to communities and individuals with interests distinct from those of the ruling elite. If this is allowed to occur it may strengthen internal cohesiveness and contribute to national security by addressing the latent fault lines

⁸⁵ Sheikha Fatima's Efforts in Women's Cause Hailed, *Gulf Times*, 13 November 2008.

⁸⁶ Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations; Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society; Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World; and Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World, available at www.arab-hdr.org/ (accessed 20 January 2009).

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Professor Emma Murphy for this observation.

which may otherwise be vulnerable to manipulation by external variables. The adoption of an inclusive and empowering vision of security would also lessen the likelihood of political violence and social conflict accompanying the transition to post-rentier structures in the GCC. However, it must be acknowledged that evidence from the projects of political reform suggest that this is unlikely to occur and that the eventual outcome will be a stalled 'halfway house' that suits neither the interests of the state nor individuals and groups within society.

At a regional level, the GCC states need to find a workable balance between reliance on the United States as an external security guarantor and the creation of a regional security architecture that can provide greater stability in the Gulf than the balance-of-power dynamic. This may best be served by engaging with Iran and a possibly resurgent post-occupation Iraq while regulating their power within an inclusive security arrangement. Such an arrangement need not entail the expansion of the GCC to include Iraq and Iran, which is unfeasible at present and is likely to remain so. Instead, it could take the form of a network of forums and mechanisms for comprehensive and cooperative security based loosely on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. With the Obama administration signalling its readiness to engage with Iran, security issues in the Gulf could be the one area of mutual interest which forms the basis for joint cooperation and confidence-building measures on both sides.

Difficult challenges lie ahead in the Arab oil monarchies. The regimes must reformulate the welfare states constructed during the 1960s and 1970s during a period of comparatively low populations and high wealth per capita. The transition to post-redistributive models of governance will require them to address the systemic structural problems in their socio-political composition. Simultaneously, the impact of the processes of globalization and their political and economic opening up presents new material and ideational linkages between the internal and external dimensions of security. Concepts and values of what and whom the idea of security involves will consequently be integral to the evolving political economies of the GCC and one of the most important factors determining whether the changes will sharpen or help overcome the latent and existing threats to security outlined in this paper.

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United Kingdom

Asharq Alawsat

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Financial Times

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Associated Press

International Herald Tribune

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Washington Post



Kristian Ulrichsen is Kuwait Research Fellow on the Kuwait Programme for Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His latest publication is *The Evolution of Internal and External Security in the Arab Gulf states* (Middle East Policy, 16(2), Summer 2009).

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