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GERD NONNEMAN

Governance, Human Rights,
and the Case for
Political Adaptation in the Gulf:
Issues in the EU-GCC
Political Dialogue

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**Governance, Human Rights, and the Case
for Political Adaptation in the Gulf:
Issues in the EU-GCC Political Dialogue**

Gerd NONNEMAN

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ABSTRACT

To be effective, the theme of good governance and human rights (GGHR) in the EU-GCC dialogue needs to be addressed in tandem with those of political and security cooperation on the wider Gulf and on the Palestine issue. It also should be two-way process, where principle is paired with cultural sensitivity (but not cultural relativism).

There are differences on GGHR questions across the GCC and within the different states themselves, but throughout, there is some local appetite for accountability and for a greater voice in the way the countries are run. This can only increase as the resources-demands equation shifts further: the projected expansion in hydrocarbons production will not fully compensate for the population explosion and costs of maintenance, hydrocarbon development, and welfare – thus undermining the ‘rentier’ social contract. Globalisation will only add to this, both by pushing for further economic reform and by bringing in new political ideas. The growing size and complexity of these societies also means that traditional channels for airing grievances, and traditional bases of legitimacy, are decreasingly able, by themselves, to assure popular acquiescence. Consequently, the case for gradual further political evolution in the GCC is a practical necessity both for the EU and the GCC regimes.

Apart from the political order, the GCC states feature other significant human rights problems, although the level varies. Even the worst case, Saudi Arabia, remains in most respects a regime of benevolent if autocratic family rule. Moreover, many of the human rights problems stem from conservative patriarchal social values rather than from government abuse. Nevertheless, both for reasons of principle and established EU policy, and for practical reasons similar to those advanced for political reform, there is a strong case for addressing this issue in the EU-GCC dialogue.

Neither in the political realm nor in that of other human rights, should ‘Islam’ be seen as an obstacle: only particular politically or socially determined interpretations of religious rules can be seen as such. Attempts to persuade such societies away from the *Sharia* are futile and misguided. But matters of interpretation and implementation, judicial systems and training, and policing, can fruitfully be addressed in exchanges of views at the non-governmental as well as the governmental level. Facilitating internal debate – tapping into already existing developments and thinking within Gulf and Muslim societies – through indirect as well as direct means, decentralised as well as government-to-government, and using persuasion rather than pressure, is likely to have the greatest effect. One specific model would be that of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), whose focus on working directly with

civil society, largely through NGOs but also through collaboration with UN and other international agencies, makes it particularly suitable. The EU should not, however, be shy of proclaiming its own principles; nor is there any reason why international agreements that have been ratified by these states themselves cannot be used as points of reference, and encouraging further such signatures: once in place, such agreements also become a possible point of reference for the local civil society.

European actors must not think in exclusively collective nor bilateral terms: bloc-to-bloc initiatives should be combined with bloc-to-state ones, as well as state-to-state approaches, depending on what is most effective in any given case. This makes it crucial that communication between EU organs and national governments is improved at the relevant levels, not least to make sure that agreed EU strategies are actually known and acted upon by national governments and their bureaucracies.

Note on the author

Dr Nonneman is Reader in International Relations & Middle East Politics at Lancaster University (UK), and a Research Fellow of the Middle East Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House, London). He is Executive Director of the British Association for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES). His previous books include *War and Peace in the Gulf* (with Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Charles Tripp); *Iraq, the Gulf States and the War*; *The Middle East and Europe: the Search for Stability and Integration*; *Development, Administration and Aid in the Middle East*; *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*; and *Political and Economic Liberalisation: dynamics and linkages in comparative perspective*.

INTRODUCTION

That EU-GCC relations have been hampered to some extent by an underdeveloped political dialogue, is perhaps a truism. There are, indeed, several weak spots in the relationship, both at the official and the societal level, relating to cultural (mis)understanding as well as political issues – the two usually intertwined, and both of them concerning *domestic* as well as *international* themes. In other words, just as domestic politics, political culture, and foreign policy are tightly interconnected in the Gulf, so are perceptions of outside actors' interventions or initiatives on any of these issues. Consequently, for instance, debates or dialogue on good governance and human rights (henceforth: GGHR), must be seen and treated as a part of this complex: both because they often intrinsically are, and because addressing them as such is likely to gain greater acceptance than has usually been the case.

This paper, therefore, should be seen as one panel of a triptych covering the broad theme of 'Political Dialogue', perhaps better labelled '*political and security cooperation*'. There are three main aspects, or subjects, to this dialogue, taking into account the main priorities of Gulf and European governments: (1) the Arab-Israeli dispute and the 'peace process'; (2) Gulf security; and (3) 'governance'. Here we deal with the third subject in particular. A separate paper will consider the other two subjects.¹

The nature and extent of the mismatches in perceptions and understanding between Europe and the GCC vary, depending not least on whether one considers the official or the popular view, and this is made more complicated still by the fact that there are not one but several such views, depending on the precise constituency concerned. This is true in Europe as much as it is in GCC – but we focus here on the latter. European interlocutors in such dialogues need to be aware of these nuances and linkages.

What this means in policy terms, is the need

- to address issues of governance and human rights in the context of cultural understanding (which is emphatically not the same as 'cultural relativism');
- to demonstrate European efforts to foster such understanding in Europe, and a willingness also to address possible European failings in the dialogue;
- to show a genuine commitment to a solution of the Palestine question, including censure of Israel where relevant.

The latter point is not invalidated by the observation that the governing elites are less 'driven' by commitment to the Palestine cause, than by pragmatic *raison*

d'état.² First, there are very few among them (and those probably mainly in Kuwait) who do not feel some personal connection to the fate of Jerusalem and the Palestinians; second, their *raison d'état*, and *raison de régime*, tells them that they cannot afford to ignore the often far stronger feelings on the subject among their populations: the issue, after all, links in to several of the pillars on which these regimes have built their legitimacy. A recent clear indication of the importance attached to the Palestinian dimension in relations with Europe and the rest of the world, were the interviews given to *Der Spiegel* and the *Financial Times* by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in June 2001.³

Moreover, by definition, attempts to address issues of GGHR must, if they are to lead anywhere, find acceptance among the populations at large. Unless the three bullet points above are observed, such attempts are likely to be tainted as hypocritical or worse, in popular perceptions outside small groups of westernised intellectuals.

NUANCES WITHIN THE GCC

Differences within the GCC exist between states, between rulers and ruled, and among the ruled themselves, not only over Palestine, but also over relations with Europe and the West in general, and over the question of domestic political arrangements and conventions. Ruling, highly educated, and cosmopolitan elites are by and large very positive towards relations with the West, of which they form in some ways a part. The larger, less cosmopolitan sections of the population – including both the less privileged and the conservative bourgeoisie – are much more ambivalent, seeing the West as a potential source of corruption, domination, and the fount of support for Israel. Attitudes to human rights – including for instance the rights of women, or the ways in which the Shari'a is applied – vary as well, even though the vast majority of the populations would bridle at any attempt to devalue the Shari'a itself as a central pillar underpinning these societies' principles. Within those parameters, some among the cosmopolitan elites will be amenable to expanding women's rights, and to a dialogue on other relevant issues. Indeed, the variation between the six states on such issues also demonstrates the variety of interpretation that is possible. Often, however, it is the more conservative population at large where resistance to the advance of such ideas is found. Again, though, popular views themselves vary between the six states as well as within them (social attitudes in Jeddah, for instance, differ markedly from those in the Saudi heartland of Najd). Politically, a chasm yawns between westernised liberals and Islamist conservatives, both on the subject of social rules and legislation, and that of political arrangements. Regimes therefore have to balance between these constituencies, as well as coping with the pressures from the outside world.

Yet it would be mistaken to conclude from this that "Human Rights is a Western concept" and that it is therefore futile or worse to attempt to impose them on these societies. Nor is it tenable to claim that "GCC countries are not interested in political representation." Let us deal with the latter issue first.

THE ISSUE OF 'DEMOCRATISATION' OR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Even the most vociferous Islamist critics of western democracy do nevertheless clamour for a say in how the country is run – or at least for the right to criticise those doing the running. That is as clear a sign of the demand for political participation as any. Here, differences of opinion are slightly differently distributed. Among the population at large, the smaller group of liberal intellectuals balance their desire for a formal system of political participation with that of containing conservative Islamists. The ruling family is often seen in this respect as a buffer. The ruling families themselves also show shades of opinion, ranging from old-style dynastic absolutism to constitutional monarchy with a democratic apparatus; the proponents of the latter, though, remain on the whole very cautious.⁴ There are of course also striking differences from country to country: Kuwait remains the furthest advanced in the impact of its parliamentary politics, but Qatar and Bahrain's fledgling and partial democratisation does (or will) include women, whereas Kuwait's still does not. Oman remains a case of benevolent, if flawed, despotism, but electoral experience is being developed (again including women) in the context of the consultative bodies; moreover, it is said that Sultan Qaboos has devised a semi-democratic set of principles for after his departure. Even in Saudi Arabia the debates in the fairly toothless *Majlis al-Shura* are often very forceful and informed,⁵ and it appears that Crown Prince Abdullah, the *de facto* ruler, is minded to expand the input of non-royal voices into policy-making; he is also thought to favour expanding women's roles in the economy, for instance.⁶ These fledgling signs of 'pluralist' awareness among the regimes derive at least in part from a recognition that there is a domestic demand for such a say, and that this can only increase in line with the relatively declining capability of the state to provide generous cradle-to-grave welfare and jobs. Opening up the decision-making process for non-royal actors, and expanding avenues for popular participation, can, moreover, also spread responsibility for difficult decisions or circumstances, or for government failures.

None of this is to say that there is a groundswell of pent-up demand for radical change in the political systems running throughout the populations of these six states, waiting to explode. What there certainly is, however, varying in strength from country to country, is gradually growing forms of political awareness, criticism of governments, and desire to see some increase in

participation and government accountability. Perhaps the clearest examples so far have been in Bahrain and Kuwait. In Bahrain, the troubles experienced during much of the 1990s eventually forced a measure of political adaptation from 1999 onwards, bringing about a huge surge in popularity for the Emir and the Crown Prince when it became clear that a genuine break with the past was being made. Indeed, the speed and extent of the reforms pushed through by the Emir, less than two years after his succession, can be seen as a conscious attempt to establish a new political base for his rule, and partly neutralising challengers from within the ruling family. In Kuwait, the level of participation in the elections of 1999 – the first case of a new Kuwaiti assembly being elected within the constitutional limit following suspension of the previous assembly by the Emir – exceeded most analysts’ expectations, and the usual mass summer emigration to escape the heat was postponed until the inauguration of the new Assembly in July.⁷ In Saudi Arabia, the evidence comes from occasional disturbances or attacks, some violent, whether among the Shi’ite population over issues of discrimination, or among opponents of the US presence in the country; and from a number of petitions to the King organised in the early 1990s by the liberal-intellectual as well as the religious establishment. There is a widespread concern among Saudi intellectuals with issues of governance (although, as indicated already, their democratic instincts may be tempered by fear of the Islamists).⁸

Demand has been less obvious but by no means absent in Oman, the UAE and Qatar. In Oman, there was considerable competition in the September 2000 elections for the *Majlis al-Shura* (under new rules which for the first time involved direct election). In the UAE, there has long been an unorganised movement among the intelligentsia arguing for greater political participation (and for instance for direct election of representatives to the Federal National Council); occasionally voices among some of the ruling families, especially in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, have sympathised with this aim. In Qatar there is very limited history of organised opposition, but when the Emir allowed free municipal elections in March 1999, participation was intense. In this Emirate, the small population and future gas riches meant the Emir could be assumed to be under less pressure than elsewhere to open up the system. That he did so nevertheless, in quite striking fashion, a few years after ousting his father as ruler, indicates his appreciation that there was indeed a demand to be tapped into, not least among the educated younger generation staffing much of the private and public sector, including the armed forces. As in the case of his namesake, Sheikh Hamad of Bahrain, it served to buttress his power base against potential challengers within the regime.⁹

Nevertheless, at least in Saudi Arabia and the UAE the regimes’ position remains that “democracy does not suit the local culture”. Sometimes the

adjectives 'Islamic' or 'Arabian' are added to characterise that 'culture.' And this reasoning has by no means fully disappeared among the ruling groups in the other GCC states.¹⁰ Yet the above should already have made clear that, whatever label one uses, the demand for increased political participation and some government accountability is not at all alien to these populations – even if some may wish to fill it in in starkly different ways. Nor is there anything in 'Islam' (itself a huge and plural category) that necessarily contradicts the basic principles of pluralist, participatory politics.¹¹ 'Culture' and 'traditions' in any case are never static, nor uniform: it is often precisely failure to adapt that kills them.

If there is a local demand, and if there is nothing inevitably and intrinsically opposed to it in local culture, then the aim of increasingly participatory politics is one that the European actors can sensibly pursue. Are there any positive reasons to do so, however? As was already hinted at earlier, there are indeed. Quite apart from the fact that the fostering of GGHR is part of the very principles on which the EU itself, and its CFSP, are meant to be built, and therefore from the arguments of moral force and consistency,¹² there are good practical reasons to encourage political development in the GCC. First, too glaring a contrast in the treatment of the GCC states on the one hand, and the rest of the developing world on the other, lays the EU open to double standards, and diminishes its credibility elsewhere – indeed possibly even within its own future expanded borders. Having publicly adopted the goals it has, and having pressed them on a number of countries – not least some in the Middle East and North Africa – the EU does not have the option of cancelling them when it comes to the GCC states. But the reasons relating to the GCC itself are just as powerful.

THE NEED FOR POLITICAL EVOLUTION

These reasons are in essence to do with the long-term stability of these states – a key interest of the EU. More precisely, gradual evolution towards greater political participation, transparency and accountability is inevitable if the economic reforms are to be enabled that will be necessary to cope with the pressures of globalisation and a growing population. At the same time, a modest further relative decline in state resources will enhance both this need for economic transformation and the likelihood of direct demands for political adaptation.

The social contract in the days of plenty – from the 1970s to the mid-1980s – was different from that of most other states: the state provided, did not tax, and demanded little of its subjects. By and large, the latter acquiesced in a system where, as long as government policy maintained this rentier

arrangement, and did not act against key values (e.g. traditional local interpretations of Islam), they had more to lose than to gain from upheaval. This was further facilitated by a traditional set of values and mechanisms assuring a sense that rulers by and large acted in accordance with the values and interests of the population.

Four key sets of changes intervened to upset this equation, and will continue to do so:

- the evolution of oil prices and markets;
- globalising pressures in the world economy;
- the population explosion;
- social change.

Population and youth explosion

The drastically reduced GNP per capita of Saudi Arabia, since the mid-1980s, to less than \$7000 in 1999, is an illustration of the shift that has already happened. Only the UAE and Qatar, among the GCC states, now feature among the world's richest states (with \$17,000 and \$21,000 respectively).¹³ This slide has been a consequence both of lower oil prices – which I shall turn to below – and the high population growth that is typical for the GCC states. At annual growth rates of well over 3 per cent, the population will at least double by 2020.

Taking the most populous country as an example, Saudi Arabia's population has already undergone a huge change in size and composition, as its infant mortality dropped and life expectancy rose to developed world levels. The country's population, which doubled in just 15 years (1980-1995), can in 2000 be estimated at around 22 million, although only about 15 million are native Saudis: the remainder are foreign workers and their dependants. Yet is not just absolute growth figures that matter. Well over 40 % of the population was younger than 15 in 2000, and over 60 % was 25 or younger. These figures rise still higher if the foreign population is excluded. Saudi estimates have the native population under 15 at over 46 % of the total. This has two obvious implications: a continuation of the high rate of population growth even if the birth rate drops (Saudi Arabia's demographic momentum ratio is one of the highest in the world), and a coming need for employment proportionately even larger than today. There have been suggestions that the rate of annual population growth may have begun to drop, and official Saudi projections have it fall to 2.6 % by 2005. But this seems unduly optimistic, and is not supported by the available evidence and trends so far. As of 2000 the rate was still around 3.5 % (and even higher according to some estimates). Growth will eventually slow, but it is, according to US Census Bureau estimates, likely to remain above 3 per cent until 2020, falling to 2.6 % only in 2020-30.¹⁴ Not only will the GCC

population expand rapidly, therefore, but the youth explosion will exacerbate the effect on the demand for jobs, services and welfare in the medium and long term.

Oil markets and prices

The era of the oil boom came to an end with the collapse of oil prices in 1986, when they dipped below \$10 per barrel. Subsequently there have been occasional spikes, but by 1998 they had again fallen to the same level. Since then, OPEC production discipline in aiming at a price band of \$22-28 per barrel has been successful in pushing prices up again, but there is no prospect of their rising again to the levels reached prior to 1986 – except for occasional crises in the politics of the region. In real terms, of course, the drop in the value of oil revenues has been even more pronounced. No precise predictions about the oil market can be made with any confidence, but there is a broad consensus that prices, by 2020, are unlikely to be much above \$22 per barrel in 2001 dollars.¹⁵

Against this stands the likely changing composition of oil supply to the world's markets. By 2020, OPEC's share is expected to rise again to about 50 per cent of world supply, from some 40 per cent today. OPEC output in absolute terms is likely to double to some 60 million barrels per day (mbd). The largest share of this production expansion will be from the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, which clearly has the largest capacity to expand production, is likely to double its exports by 2020.¹⁶ Kuwait and the UAE are also thought to be able to double their oil production capacity by 2020. This will necessitate major investment in exploration and development. Production costs in the Gulf are less than \$1.50 per barrel, and the investment needed to expand production by 1 barrel per day is estimated as less than \$5000. This means that, even at conservative price projections, total development and operating costs over the period to 2020 will amount to no more than 20 per cent of revenues. On these assumptions, net oil revenues for Saudi Arabia would fall behind population growth by about 20 per cent at most, taking account also increased domestic consumption. This shortfall would of course turn out smaller if actual production expansion exceeds this expectation.

In any case, even in the cases of these three countries, resources relative to population are likely to fall somewhat further. In those other GCC states where expansion capacity is smaller this picture is correspondingly bleaker. In Bahrain, indeed, reserves are almost exhausted, and Oman and Qatar are thought to have little room for capacity expansion. Against this, of course, increased gas production may provide relief. Yet that will itself require major investment. Only in Qatar does the financial future in this respect look distinctly rosy, with

the already well-advanced development of its huge gas reserves, set against its tiny population.

Overall, however, the picture remains one where the period of apparently unlimited riches, experienced in the period between 1974 and 1986, is definitively over. The stresses already experienced in GCC budgets in recent years will not disappear. They will, moreover, continue to be exacerbated by the sharp fluctuations in prices and revenues which have buffeted these economies since the mid-1980s, as long as their hydrocarbon dependence remains at current levels.

Putting hydrocarbon revenues in context

One might observe at this point that financial problems are only relative, since the budget balances only look tight because of huge defence outlays of up to 40 per cent of revenues, and the large, usually unaccounted-for, slices of national revenue going into the maintenance of the extensive and expanding royal families. Both observations are true in their own right. But a reallocation of resources in those fields will not be easy.

The royal families, exemplified by the Al Saud, have been experiencing an annual growth rate at least as high as the population overall. Just the number of Saudi princes alone is estimated to double every 22 years; royal males under 18 are already thought to be some 70% more numerous than those over that age.¹⁷ Even a cutback in the royal subsidy regime – difficult enough to achieve – will still see outlays rise. Defence will remain a sensitive and important area, given the uncertainties in the regional environment, not least because of the unresolved Iraqi dilemma. Weapons purchases may be slowly reduced, in line with the general squeeze on resources, but a drastic reallocation from defence to other areas seems unlikely. While it is true that much of the high-tech hardware being purchased is less than fully effectively deployed, part of the function of these purchases is as ‘insurance’, making it more likely that the supplying countries will come to the GCC states’ aid in a crisis.

More important, perhaps, are the effects that the age structure and growth in population will have: as already indicated, the demand for new jobs will not merely rise in line with absolute population growth, but will be intensified by the large numbers of young people coming onto the labour market. In addition there are the concomitant strains on the education budget. Increasingly, also, the changing nature of society, education and exposure to global information may bring about a desire for ‘real’, useful employment.

The need for very significant extra investment in oil and gas development has already been referred to. Beyond this, maintenance, updating, and expansion of infrastructure and utilities to cope with the growing population and increased urbanisation will also require huge investments, which are likely to run to at least \$300 billion over the period 2000-20.¹⁸

In short, even the expected expansion in hydrocarbons production, especially given increased domestic consumption, will not avoid a squeeze on resources. Yet there is another, straightforward indication of the limitation of oil revenues as an economic pillar. Taking the quarter century from 1970, World Bank data show an average *decline* in Saudi Arabia's GDP per capita of nearly 3 % in real terms, notwithstanding the double oil boom of the mid- and late 1970s. Of course, the choice of beginning and end of such a reference period may distort the picture. But even over the price recovery period of 1998-2000, GDP per capita on average rose very little, passing the \$7000 mark again in 2000. As a reflection of a period of sharp rises in oil prices that is hardly impressive, especially when the nominal figures are turned into real growth rates. GDP growth for 2001-2003 is forecast at well below 3 %, meaning a further decline in GDP per capita.¹⁹ In sum, the expected level of future economic growth will not be sufficient to avoid a further modest slide in GDP per capita.

Globalisation

'Globalisation' is affecting the GCC states' socio-political and economic model in two ways: one is directly economic, the other a matter of ideas. The domestic need to cope with the economic pressures and requirements analysed earlier, is in itself already a major reason for economic reform. But the ever more explicitly global rules of the international economy are now, additionally, making it much harder to escape the disciplines of the international market even if Gulf leaders wanted to. For countries so dependent on world trade, opting out of the WTO, or, at a smaller scale, foregoing free trade arrangements with, for instance, the EU, is no longer considered a realistic option. To the contrary, the economic and – just as importantly – political advantages to be had by joining such frameworks have come to be seen as outweighing the economic fears and drawbacks, at least as long as the right temporary concessionary conditions can be negotiated. Internal and external factors intertwine, therefore, to build inexorable pressure for liberalising and otherwise reforming the economy, including by reducing subsidies and bringing external competition. As indicated below, however, genuine reforms of that nature, however necessary for domestic economic reasons, will inevitably, eventually, bring further pressures for improved political participation.

Those pressures can only be added to by the second face of globalisation, *viz.* the increased permeability of Saudi society to political ideas from around the world: not just 'democratic' ideals but a whole range of ideologies and approaches which, 'democratic' or not, may imply an increased tendency to question existing arrangements. Information technology also has the effect of making information and debate about domestic affairs much more readily available – even if it has to be routed through external channels.

Tentative moves towards economic and political reform show that some among the GCC leaderships have realised the pre-2000 model is unlikely to be a sustainable arrangement.

Dealing with the 'problem'

There are only three means to deal with the combination of pressures generated by these changes: economic reform; political liberalisation; and the use of traditional legitimising tools. The argument here is that a combination of all three will be required: the first two are interlinked; traditional sources of legitimacy on their own will no longer be sufficient; and the only alternative beyond all this, increased repression, has been shown by the case of pre-2000 Bahrain to be neither viable nor necessary as a long-term route.

The first means comes down to economic diversification and the creation of a more internationally competitive economy. All governments in the GCC have been making some gestures in this direction. But this eventually implies a drastic scaling back of the entitlement economy to which the population has become used – with the introduction of taxation, real jobs, realistic wages, a reduction in foreign labour, and fewer subsidies for utilities and uneconomic jobs. In other words, some significant measure of pain and adjustment for most sectors of the population becomes inevitable. This creates further pressures for the second means, *viz.* political liberalisation: there is no reason at all why the maxim "no taxation without representation" should somehow be peculiarly inapplicable in the GCC. But in addition, the government may wish to bring in others to share the responsibility and, perhaps, the blame. The third possible means of shoring up the legitimacy that is inevitably being undermined by the impact of economic liberalisation,²⁰ is increased use of legitimising themes of tradition and ideology – be it Islam or the Palestine issue (socialism being quite distinctly out). Tradition, at least, is of decreasing potency in its own right, because of changing social and popular attitudes that come with a changing society, but also because 'traditional' themes can no longer easily be dissociated from performance on other indicators.

Traditional mechanisms and sources of legitimacy

It is true that there were, and to some extent still are, traditional forms of contact between rulers and ruled, which arguably were long a workable way of making sure grievances were heard and acted upon or pre-empted. Together with the comfortable demands-resources ratio, this made serious revolt unlikely. In the earlier situation – until the early 1980s – demands from groups outside the ruling elites for a say in the running of the country were (a) limited, and (b) fairly successfully channelled in traditional ways using traditional mechanisms. A changing environment is affecting this directly. The downward turn in the balance between resources and demands since 1986 is only one part of this equation. The other is that society, economy and polity have become more complex (as well as larger), especially because of the advent of oil wealth and all the changes that this has brought about, including fast and far-reaching urbanisation, education, and the access to ideas and images that has come with information technology.

Traditional channels for information flows and interaction between regime and society, functioning acceptably until the 1960s, have gradually become less able to cope effectively. Large, highly bureaucratised, technologically advanced economies and societies are far less amenable to management through personal access via the royal *majlis*, to take but one example. Such channels therefore inevitably have been losing some of their legitimacy as a way for society to express grievances and get access to those in power.

It is true also that these regimes have, to varying extents, been successful at employing other sources of legitimacy, including long-established traditional means. But these, too, are often coming under pressure.

The main traditional sources of domestic regime legitimacy have historically been five-fold:²¹

- personal charisma of the leader;
- tradition, and the maintenance by the regime of traditional values in government and society;
- patronage, and the ability to deliver improvements in the quality of life;
- behaviour and government appropriate for Muslim rulers (especially important in Saudi Arabia); and
- effectiveness of the rulers in dealing with the outside world: this was already so in pre-modern times: much of the role of the senior sheikhs or 'rulers' was concerned with this task.

Today, and into the next two decades, serious question marks arise over each of these factors – although again there is a good deal of variation between the individual states. Let us briefly look at each factor in turn.

(1) Several of the Gulf states have been blessed with particularly charismatic leaders. Obvious examples are Kings Abdulaziz and Faisal in Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi – not only effective leaders but respected as such, as well as for their perceived personal qualities. In Oman, Sultan Qaboos has proved an astute and independent-minded ruler, and managed, from being virtually unknown, to acquire a good deal of personal respect during his years in power. Saudi Arabia's current King, Fahd, was perceived as a strong personality and effective manager during his long years as a crown prince and the first decade or so of his reign, but thereafter appeared to become less forceful as he increasingly suffered from ill health. In Bahrain, Sheikh Isa retained a good deal of affection until his death in 1999, notwithstanding the eruptions of political violence: he retained the image of a well-meaning, affable father-figure, while much of the most direct criticism was directed at his brother Sheikh Khalifa, the Prime Minister.

Considering the six states today, the picture is far from even. Kuwait's Emir is respected but frail and not always seen as very decisive. The crown prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad, has suffered a rather bad press. In the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed's passing (he is now in his 80s) will leave the federation without anyone of similar stature: the heir apparent, Sheikh Khalifa, is seen as possessing neither the capabilities nor the strength of character of his father – even if in recent years his image has recovered somewhat. This may be problematic for Abu Dhabi, but possibly even more so for the cohesion and management of the UAE as a whole (where the most forceful figure will be found in Dubai, in the person of the crown prince Sheikh Mohammed Al-Maktum). In Saudi Arabia, the fact that King Fahd is virtually incapacitated is in itself troublesome, as is the constant flow of rumour and criticism (justified or otherwise) of a number of other princes – most prominently Prince Sultan, who is next in line for the throne after Crown Prince Abdullah – for greed, corruption, lack of nationalism and, on occasion, un-Islamic behaviour. Here, though, the Crown Prince is an excellent counterweight: in terms of reputation and his alleged policy preferences, he is among the most respected of the senior princes. As for Oman, the problem is not so much Sultan Qaboos himself, as the fact that there is no heir, nor an obvious successor. At the same time, the Sultan no longer enjoys the reputation of accessibility which his 'meet the people' tours used to engender; he is increasingly viewed as isolated by the small power elite surrounding him. In Bahrain and Qatar, finally, the new Emirs are still consolidating their position and, being young and having only fairly recently assumed power, cannot rely on

the power of their inevitably still limited charisma (it is interesting to note that it is they who have opted for a 'democratic' departure of sorts: indeed, as argued above, the speed of the Bahraini reforms, once they came, may in part be explained as a successful grab for popular support by the new Emir).²²

(2) Tradition, and the maintenance by the regime of traditional values in society and government, are also vulnerable as a means to safeguard legitimacy. The changing world of technology and economics at times necessitate government policies that appear to run counter to tradition. Such changes also inevitably mean that society itself changes, along with the driving forces of social interaction and politics; hence, so do popular values, expectations and demands.

(3) Patronage and the ability to deliver improvements in the quality of life – an essential part of regime strategies from their very origin – runs up directly against the relative shrinking of resources. This is especially problematic given the youth explosion and the very high expectations which several decades of state generosity have created.

(4) In all six of these states 'Islamic' legitimacy is important: both personally and in their policies, rulers need to be seen as 'good Muslims'. This is, of course, especially crucial in Saudi Arabia, whose regime derives its claim to power from the role of the Al-Saud as protector of the Holy Places and of Islamic values. Anything which affects their reputation in this regard is therefore potentially destabilising. This need not mean strict adherence to particular 'conservative' interpretations (the variations between Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia are testimony to that), but any behaviour or policy that is perceived as improper by a significant section of the population, has the power to undermine legitimacy. It should be noted, though, that – unless the transgression is truly egregious – such criticism generally is less of an issue when performance under the other four factors of legitimacy is satisfactory. In other words: the worse the performance on the other four, the more importance this factor will acquire.

(5) The traditional expectation that the ruler should be able to deal effectively with the outside world could, and still can, rebound on him. Securing the polity against external threat, making the necessary deals with outside powers, and safeguarding trade and commerce have always been crucial parts of this task. In such dealing with the outside world, the ruler in effect also performed the function of 'buffer' between that world and the domestic society. Perceived failure in each of these functions will reflect badly on the ruler's (or the regime's) legitimacy. The Gulf regimes have always needed to balance the need for foreign protection, for instance, with avoiding being seen as mere

servants of those protectors, or as allowing them undue interference in local society. Instances of criticism on these grounds are the question of policy on Palestine versus dependence on Israel's protector, the USA; and the 1990-91 Gulf War, during which the Al-Saud in particular were accused by some of over-reliance on Western protection and bringing in socially disruptive foreign and non-Islamic influences (this of course ties in with the 'Islamic' factor above).

Outlook

Difficulties in a single one of these five factors can usually be absorbed by performance on the others; by the same token, the greater weaknesses there are across different factors, the more of a potential threat to regime stability each one becomes. At the start of the 21st century, performance on any of the five cannot be taken for granted – indeed there are problems with several for all six regimes. If one combines this finding with the basic demands/resources equation outlined earlier, a two-fold conclusion is inescapable:

- grievances and complaints about both material and other aspects of life and government *will* increase (not least when the expansion of taxes becomes necessary);
- popular demands for a say in how the country is run *will* increase.

The first of these trends, as experience from history and other parts of the world shows, almost always leads to the second – and the two are usually expressed together. Of course, the timing and precise form will vary strongly between the six states. Problems are probably furthest away for Qatar and the UAE, given their better resources-demands ratio. But the most telling illustration of the phenomenon has been seen during the 1990s in the one state where the resources/demands equation has slipped furthest first: Bahrain.²³ It is not coincidental that it is in Bahrain that the most recent experiment in political adaptation has got underway since late 1999.

HUMAN RIGHTS

For European governments and the EU, then, it makes perfect sense – indeed it is imperative – to encourage such adaptation. Other human rights questions should be seen in this context. There can be no question that, even apart from the right peacefully to change one's government, the human rights situation in these countries is far from ideal, as is shown in the various country reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the US State Department.²⁴ The strongest criticisms have been justifiably aimed at Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, although in the latter the situation in 2000-01 has improved

dramatically. Freedoms are clearly most constricted, and abuses most frequent, in Saudi Arabia. Yet it is important to put this observation in perspective: even the situation in Saudi Arabia does not come anywhere near that of egregious cases such as North Korea, Iraq, China, Myanmar, or a number of African states. Indeed, for the majority of the population the Saudi regime has been a benevolent autocracy – or perhaps more accurately, benevolent if autocratic family rule, implemented in ways that chime with local expectations. Moreover, many of the problems criticised by outside reports stem in fact from conservative patriarchal social values rather than simply from government policy or abuse. Nevertheless, problems there are, and both as a matter of principle (and established EU policy) and for pragmatic reasons similar to those advanced with regard to political evolution, there is a strong case for addressing this area in the EU-GCC dialogue.

Some issues, such as the existence of the death penalty, would not be a fruitful area of action, since there is an almost unanimous consensus in favour, at least of the principle. A different matter is the way in which verdicts are reached. Again, it would be futile to expect abandonment of Shari'a courts in favour of secular western-style ones. For the vast majority of the population, Shari'a law and Shari'a courts are a natural and proper part of life as Muslims in a Muslim country. But there is certainly scope for amending the procedures of these courts: they differ, in any case, across the Islamic world. There is also considerable scope for improving the training of judges. There is, in fact, also significant room for interpretations of Islamic law that would bring practice much closer to established international human rights standards. Dialogue about the sources and nature of Islamic law, in a genuine two-way process, preferably also involving Muslim Europeans, could offer real scope for bringing forward ideas in that direction. Sources for such reinterpretation abound, both in the actual practices around the Islamic world, including the Gulf itself and the rest of the Middle East, and in the huge and rich body of Islamic thought over the centuries to this day.²⁵ Equally clearly, no-one enjoys being arbitrarily arrested, or tortured; these are issues on which there is no intrinsic clash of cultures. The case of Bahrain's protests in the 1990s is again instructive here.

Women's rights and their full involvement in the economy and public life, are issues being much discussed among local activists and intellectuals – even if there remains a reluctant conservative majority. Again, there is no 'Islamic' barrier here: some of the most effective arguments in favour have been put forward by female Muslim scholars.²⁶ Europe should not be shy of advocating basic principles in this regard.

The roots of the human rights infractions observed in the GCC states, then, have been four-fold: legal interpretation and practice, policing practice, social values, and political interests and calculation. But these categories cannot easily be separated. An awareness of the connections between these four is essential. Some abuses may arise from straightforwardly political roots (and thus link in to the debate on political adaptation); some may follow social constraints, and be reinforced by political fears of breaching those constraints; some, such as the striking and self-perpetuating preponderance in the Saudi judiciary of religious judges from the ultra-conservative region of Qasim, may have Islamic legal forms, and certainly have legal-practical consequences, but arise from political history and calculation.²⁷ Finally, much of the brutality and arbitrariness complained about by private GCC nationals as well as outside agencies, can be blamed on policing practice. Police officers are often ill-trained, and not infrequently foreign, although there is much variation between the six states (with Saudi Arabia again coming off worst).²⁸ To label any of these features as either intrinsic to Islam, or forever hostage to local culture, is quite untenable.

In all areas of governance and human rights, then, there are strong reasons of principle and practical interest for Europe to be engaged; there are no insurmountable obstacles of a cultural nature; but it is important that such engagement exhibit cultural understanding, and awareness of the evolving variations among the publics and regimes of the GCC. It is also crucial that it be seen to be married to words and action both in Europe's own internal fostering of understanding of the Gulf, and on the Palestine issue. The worst possible signal, undermining the credibility of any initiatives on governance and human rights aimed at the GCC (or other Arab states, for that matter), are moves such as the EU abstention over the October 2000 resolution in the UN Human Rights Commission (Geneva) condemning Israel's human rights record in the second Intifada – even if some other recent EU statements have been critical of Israel.

INSTRUMENTS

There is no reason for the EU not to follow a similar pattern as with other third countries, i.e. to include GGHR as an “essential element” of EU external relations – both bilaterally and in new or amended EU-GCC agreements (such as on the occasion of the Free Trade Agreement being concluded, presumably in 2005). This is not merely formalism, it also corresponds with the EU's clearly enounced principles, recently reinforced in a number of communications and declarations on human rights and democratisation. As demonstrated by the case of the USSR under Helsinki, such agreed phrases can have effect beyond the signatories' expectations. In any case, the option of somehow excepting the

GCC states from what has become an explicitly announced basic principle for relations with all other countries, is neither practically nor politically feasible.

Nevertheless, the precise way in which the issues are approached, the instruments used, and the language that is used, should reflect the cultural understanding advocated earlier, as well as an awareness that the situation in these countries compares reasonably well with many other LDCs. Finally, it must also be recognised that these states are in a category of their own in terms of wealth, economic and human development. Dialogue on these issues must therefore be constructed as explicitly between equals, and as going both ways. The May 2001 Communication from the Commission already lends support for this: "the dialogue [with third countries]... should be a two-way one, with the EU also agreeing to discuss human rights and democratisation issues within its own borders."²⁹ But none of this means, indeed must not mean, that criticism and suggestions cannot be offered.

In some contexts, the use of the terms 'good governance' and 'sharing best practice' is likely to be more effective in maintaining such dialogue, than unremitting advocacy of western-style 'democracy'. But no excuse is necessary for including in a 'dialogue of ideas' the European principle of upholding human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. A simultaneous willingness to participate in, and listen to, Muslim-led debates on human rights in Islam, however, would be a prerequisite for finding a real audience. Bringing the discussion to that level, moreover, may eventually allow increased exposure of those voices within the GCC (and elsewhere in the Muslim world) which are already offering sophisticated interpretations of Islamic principles – interpretations that in many ways come quite close to the EU's own basic principles. Indeed, indirectly facilitating internal debate is likely to be at least as effective as any pressures to adopt Western models. Certainly, though, there is no reason why international agreements that have been ratified by these states themselves, cannot be used as points of reference. Indeed, in Saudi Arabia under Crown Prince Abdullah there has indeed already sprung up a fledgling discussion on human rights issues in 2000 and 2001, as the government acceded (with a reservation) to the UN Women's Convention, and began to establish a number of institutions in the human rights field.³⁰

One crucial way in which the case of the GCC differs from that of most other LDCs, is that there are no assistance programmes, nor the usual financial cooperation agreements to which political dialogue and especially dialogue on GGHR is usually attached. As a consequence, European states and the EU as a whole also do not, in the case of the GCC, have the sort of leverage over governments that normally comes with this.

European initiatives must, in any case, also reach below the official level, addressing civil society directly (or, if you will, indirectly influencing government adaptation through fostering the development of civil society). This fits in with the point made earlier, on the value of facilitating internal debate.

‘Decentralised cooperation,’ introduced in other relationships but also now part of the EU-GCC relationship, is an excellent example of indirect, civil society-oriented initiatives that can foster GGHR. One particular initiative to illustrate this, the ‘University Cooperation’ part of the EU-GCC decentralised cooperation planned after 1995, also had the benefit of fulfilling some of the other conditions I referred to – but it was rather embarrassingly undone by bureaucratic difficulties inside the Commission and miscommunication between Brussels and a national (European) government – as well as within that government.³¹ Similar initiatives deserve pursuing, both specifically aimed at GGHR issues and more indirect ones such as the universities project: the latter type may be more easily acceptable but nevertheless quite effective in the long run.

Taking things beyond the current element of decentralised cooperation, by opening collective agreements with the GCC to non-state actors, as in the recent Cotonou agreement with the ACP states,³² would be a particularly worthwhile aim.

The question of leverage is not the only constraint on European policy: there is a budget consideration too. GGHR initiatives or support cannot be funded from the main GGHR-related budget of the EU, because that is attached to assistance programmes. There is, though, the “European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights” (EIDHR) that was started in 1994, and under which about €100 million has been available each year.³³ Whether funded from this or otherwise, there is clearly scope for some engagement in the GCC modelled on the kinds of initiatives pursued under that heading. EIDHR’s brief is “to support human rights, democratisation and conflict prevention activities to be carried out primarily in partnership with NGOs and international organisations.”³⁴ Some 80 % of EIDHR commitments in 2000 indeed went to NGO activities, as well as some €6 million to UN and other international organisations.³⁵ The initiative annually determines a number of “thematic priorities”, and target groups, as well as “focus countries”. Again the absence of the GCC states as a region is striking – even though a very few planned NGO activities in 2000 did include Kuwait and Bahrain in a wider Arab framework. Projects are sponsored on the basis of bids in response to calls for proposals (either at the EU level, or locally), or as “targeted projects” that support policy objectives that cannot be covered that way. As the Commission itself observed, one of the initiative’s advantages is that it “can be used to take more political

risks than the support provided by a member state with commercial and political interests.”³⁶

The initiative's first thematic priority is “support to strengthen democratisation, good governance and the rule of law”, mainly by working directly with civil society through NGOs. Part of this is “support for measures facilitating the peaceful democratic conciliation of group interests”: this, along with “training in the rule of law, and in particular human rights law,” is seen as important for another of the EU's aims, viz. that of conflict prevention.³⁷ Clearly, this theme is relevant for the case of the GCC states, and several of the activities undertaken under this theme elsewhere would be useful examples.³⁸ The other current themes are (1) activities in support of the abolition of the death penalty; (2) support for the fight against torture and for international tribunals and criminal courts; and (3) combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination against minorities. The first of these is not a feasible priority target when it comes to the GCC states – even if the EU certainly should not shirk from proclaiming its own principles in this regard. The latter two, however, are areas where European attention could usefully be focused, and where some common interests or reciprocities with the GCC states can be identified as a basis for joint initiatives or, at the very least, widening agreement on the principles concerned.³⁹ In short, while there is not a strong case for making the GCC a group of ‘focus’ countries under EIDHR, they would certainly merit being officially brought into the remit of the initiative. EIDHR's focus on working directly with civil society, largely through NGOs, but also through collaboration with UN and other international agencies, makes it particularly well suited to addressing many of the issues identified in the GCC states.

The main leverage that European actors do have over the GCC governments is likely to lie in the latter's interest in trade and investment relations with the countries of the EU. This includes, of course, the proposed Free Trade Agreement (aimed for by 2005), and generally the GCC's need for access to EU markets. To be successfully deployed, however, this instrument depends on the EU's demonstrating that there is indeed a genuine willingness to open European markets. This resembles a similar problem in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative (especially as regards agriculture): unless such opening-up is forthcoming, both incentive and credibility shrink significantly. Available sanctions are also fewer in number than in the case of aid recipients. They would have to centre around market access. This should be thought of, if at all, as a pre-emptive element that could be built into trade and cooperation agreements in advance, but in future could be problematic in view of WTO rules. In addition, of course, there is always the possibility of withholding other sorts of cooperation, or of causing political embarrassment.

But such pressures need not be the only incentive for development. First, as already indicated, common interests and reciprocities can be identified and expanded, and joint initiatives developed which, even if indirectly and over time, help bring the GGHR aims closer.

Secondly, there is a perfectly good case to be made based on the long-term political self-interest of the regimes: adaptation to changing social, technological and economic circumstances is essential if stability is to be assured. Such adaptation will need to be both political and economic – with the latter also translating into further need for the former. Persuasion, then, is at least as important as pressure. In this respect ‘quiet diplomacy’, probably better conducted by representatives of individual states, is of central importance. This is also an example of an area where individual countries’ experience and contacts with particular GCC regimes can be more useful than collective approaches (the UK’s long relationship with the Gulf comes to mind). In such efforts of persuasion, it is increasingly possible to use the examples of Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar to encourage the others, or to counter fears of upheaval. Indeed, in the case of Bahrain’s recent evolution, such persuasion has no doubt been of some importance.

One key principle, then, is not to think simply in terms of the EU: think bilateral where bilateral can work best – e.g. where one state has experience or special access. The answer to the question: “bilateral or collective?” must be “both”, and this at both ends: bloc-to-bloc initiatives should be combined with bloc-to-state ones, as well as with state-to-state approaches. This makes it all the more crucial that, in Europe, communication between EU organs and national governments is improved at the levels where it is relevant, to make sure that Brussels and the national governments know what each is doing, but especially to make sure that agreed EU strategies are actually known and acted upon by national governments and their bureaucracies.

Suggestions for specific initiatives

Some specific areas in which European initiatives could bear fruit in the above context, would include the following:

- Work towards the inclusion of a Cotonou-style stipulation in future EU-GCC agreements, according to which civil society is formally given an enhanced role.⁴⁰
- Including some GCC initiatives among EIDHR’s portfolio – or at least pursue similar projects, both through NGOs and in collaboration with UN and international agencies.

- Generally support dialogue initiatives run by NGOs, including universities.

- Explore the feasibility of an EU-GCC 'jamboree' where all relevant European, GCC and international NGOs would come together.

- Enhancing exchanges of visits by parliamentarians, and the development of parliamentary networks and seminars/working groups.

- Cultural / educational exchange and seminars aimed at the new generation. Good bilateral examples have been the FCO/Sandhurst conference, in 1999, on *The Gulf: Challenges and Opportunities for the New Generation*; and the involvement of one British university in the education and training of the Qatari Crown Prince.⁴¹ An idea worth pursuing would be the development of a network for 'young leaders' from the EU and the GCC, or the inclusion of the GCC a wider EU-Middle East young leaders' network.⁴²

- Projects to stimulate in the GCC the study of politics as a discipline, including through curriculum development collaboration and exchange of teaching and research staff.

- Sponsoring of research on European politics in general and the EU in particular, among Gulf academics and research students. One means would be the stimulation of joint research projects.

- Working towards the establishment of European Studies Centres in Gulf universities, together with a demonstration that the expansion of Gulf studies in Europe is seen as important. The aborted EU-GCC University Cooperation project offers a useful model – indeed should be relaunched in some form.

- Offer to share European experience with those – especially governments – engaged in discussing, designing or implementing electoral principles or procedures, and constitutional reform. Where this proves acceptable, NGOs such as *Transparency International* – already supported under EIDHR elsewhere – could be associated with such work, for instance through running workshops.

- Collaboration in judicial training and penal reform (using experts with knowledge of Islam & preferably Arabic); this could include professional training for lawyers in the courts (whether already in place or aspiring); training in international law; and training in human rights law. One of the forms this could take would be joint legal seminars on human rights – as in one EIDHR-supported initiative between the EU and China. There is also a precedent in the Arab world for EIDHR support for a penal reform initiative, in the work of the NGO *Penal Reform International* in North Africa.⁴³

- Support activities to educate/train military and police personnel in human rights issues and in civil-military and community-police relations; it is important that this be pursued under the joint auspices of EU and GCC

governments, and indeed could include personnel from EU or applicant countries.

- Expansion of, and adding a Gulf focus to, the kinds of human rights-related projects already being undertaken in the Arab world with EIDHR support. Particularly interesting examples are the project of the *Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme* “to develop constructive relations between human rights organisations and local authorities, and to strengthen synergies between the various local organisations in the Mediterranean region”; and an extensive regional project by the Arab Institute for Human Rights “to strengthen the capacities of human rights NGOs and the role of the media in human rights”, (which also “aims to encourage the introduction of human rights into the teaching programmes of Ministries of Education and to develop training activities on the protection of women’s and children’s rights”).⁴⁴
- Support for initiatives aimed at the media, including the development of networks for journalists from both regions, and professional journalism training.
- Collaboration in women’s professional educational programmes.
- Support for local/Arab/Muslim NGO activities aimed at women’s issues. Some examples for the Arab world are already included within EIDHR.⁴⁵
- Collaborate with, and support, the relevant international bodies, as well as relevant international NGOs such as, in particular, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch: generic support of this nature can help achieve results without tying the EU directly to particular public criticisms of particular regimes, and fits well with the philosophy of EIDHR.

CONCLUSION

It is conceivable that general principles can be built into agreements, phrased carefully to avoid accusations of Western cultural bias (in the agreement with the ACP states, for instance, the term “democratic principles” is used instead of “democracy”). This can (rightly) be presented as implementing the same policy as with all other third country agreements since 1992, where respect for human rights and democracy are described as “essential elements” of the EU’s relationships. These principles in turn can help nudge the evolution in the field of good governance and human rights forward, even if not always in ways foreseen by the regimes. Once agreed, they are there to be referred to by non-governmental actors as well.

Although the EU side in any EU-GCC dialogue should not hide its principles and convictions under a bushel, a gradual strategy, using persuasion and a variety of direct and indirect initiatives aimed at, with, or through civil society, is likely to be more effective and indeed more appropriate than direct

attempts to impose European-style change wholesale – also because only thus can local populations end up owning the changes. Contrary to cases such as Iraq's, moreover, such gradualism is acceptable because of the relatively benign human rights environment in the GCC. As the May 2001 Communication from the Commission already pointed out, flexibility and country-specific criteria and assessment are of the essence, although mechanistic use of indicators should be avoided, in favour of context-aware assessment of trends.

All of this must be encapsulated in an approach that is seen to be culturally sensitive as well as two-way and, wherever possible, pursued jointly. No less important, it should be accompanied by European gestures on the international stage that make it easier for both populations and regimes to appreciate European admonitions as anything other than overbearing and hypocritical.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Anoushiravan Ehteshami & Gerd Nonneman, "EU-GCC dialogue on security and international affairs," discussion paper presented to the Third Gulf Strategy Discussion, Bertelsmann Foundation, Munich, 20-22 September 2001.
- ² The predominance of pragmatism in Arab states' foreign policies is well established in a range of recent research, including Raymond Hinnebusch & Anoush Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States* (Lynne Rienner, 2001). For the Gulf states, this has been all the more the case – as exemplified in the history of British-Gulf relations: see Gerd Nonneman, "Constants and Variations in British-Gulf relations", in Joe Kechichian (ed.), *Iran, Iraq and the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). The Saudi case is examined in Greg Gause, "Saudi Arabia", in Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, *op. cit.*; in Gause's *Oil Monarchies* (Brookings Institution, 1996); and in Nonneman, "Saudi-European Relations 1902-2001", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 77. No. 3 (July 2001), pp. 631-661. Nevertheless, all of these studies also demonstrate the salience of the Palestine issue.
- ³ *Der Spiegel*, 11 June 2001; and Roula Khalaf, "Regal Reformer", in *Financial Times*, 25 June 2001.
- ⁴ Interviews with Saudi and Kuwaiti intellectuals in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Kuwait, 1997-2000. See also Gregory Gause, *Oil Monarchies, op cit.*
- ⁵ Information from Saudi and other observers of Majlis proceedings, including members of the Majlis, 1998-2001.
- ⁶ Interviews with Saudi observers, 1996-2000 (including Riyadh & Jeddah, December 1998, London 2000); Gulf2000 confidential network. On the increasing (non-royal) professionalisation of the Saudi administration see also Nawaf Obaid, *The Oil Kingdom at 100* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).
- ⁷ For a contemporary commentary, see Gerd Nonneman, "Kuwait's new parliament", in *Middle East International*, 20 August 1999, pp. 21-23. See also Shafeeq Ghabra, "Democratization in Kuwait", article posted to Gulf2000 confidential network, 11 June 2001. On developments in Bahrain pre-reform, see Joe Stork, *Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain* (Washington: Human Rights Watch Middle East, 1997); and, post-reform, "People's Power and the Emir", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2001. Direct information on the Bahraini situation since 1999 was obtained also from prominent opposition figures, now able to visit the country after some two decades of exile.
- ⁸ See Peter Wilson & Douglas Graham, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm*, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994); and Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia: the politics of dissent* (London: Macmillan, 1999).
- ⁹ See Andrew Rathmell & Kirsten Schulze, "Political Reform in the Gulf: the case of Qatar", in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, no. 4, (October 2000), pp. 47-62, where the argument is made that the opening up (a) was driven not by economic pressure but by the political calculation indicated; and (b) that in any case the key area of state finances remains outside the remit of the reforms. The first point still begs the question why there should be such support for the reforms in the first place. ready to be mined. The suggested answer, "pride in Qatar's being different from its neighbours", merely displaces the question. The second point is valid; however, other

participatory reforms are likely in the end' bring demands for a say also in this area of policy.

10 Apart from a number of official statements in this respect, this was also exemplified by a minority among a young audience drawn from Gulf elites and royal families, in the course of a seminar on political challenges in the GCC, which I was asked to run at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, July 1999. The seminar was part of a conference on *Gulf Security: Challenges for the New Generation*, organised by Sandhurst, RUSI and the FCO. Interestingly, however, these conservative voices were exceeded in number by those more equivocal, while some forcefully argued the opposite case.

11 See Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 1991). There is also a distinction in Islamic law between 'fixed' (*thaabit*) matters of worship and principle on the one hand, and, on the other, 'changeable' (*mutaghayyir*) matters of implementation and specifics (*mu'amaalat*). Particular political blueprints clearly fall under the latter. See G. Krämer, "Islamist notions of democracy", in J. Beinín & J. Stork (eds.), *Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 71-82. See also Sisk, *Islam and Democracy* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 1992).

12 See European Commission, "Human Rights and Democratisation", http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/intro/index.htm; Chris Patten, "Role of Human Rights and Democratisation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution", speech to Human Rights Forum, Brussels, May 28-29, 2001, posted on http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/speech01_243.htm; and European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The European Union's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries*, Brussels: European Commission, 8 May 2001 (COM(2001) 252 final).

13 For a good recent overview of trends in the Gulf economies (including Iran and Iraq), see Sadashi Fukuda (ed.), *Politics, Economy and Sanctions in the Persian Gulf States* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, March 2001).

14 Data and estimates from Ministry of Planning, Riyadh; World Bank, *World Development Indicators, 2000*; and US Census Bureau, "IDB Summary Geographic data for Saudi Arabia", <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbsum/html>. World Bank projections are somewhat more conservative, expecting average annual growth of 2.9 % in the period to 2015. Certainly in terms of the native population that seems unduly low.

15 See for instance Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Outlook 2001* (Washington, DC: Department of Energy, 2001).

16 Rough estimate on the basis of a range of sources; for a representative example see *Ibid.*, and the 1999 and 2000 issues.

17 Anthony Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), p. 27.

18 This figure is a rough estimate based on past investment plans and current expectation of needs, and is at the lower end of informal estimates by some Saudi economists and commentators.

19 Data and estimates from World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, several years to 2000; *CIA World Factbook 2000: Saudi Arabia*; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Saudi Arabia: Country Profile 2001*; and Economist Intelligence Unit, *Saudi Arabia: Country Reports 1997-2001*.

20 For an excellent analysis of the links between legitimacy and economic reform, see Emma Murphy, "Legitimacy and Economic Reform in the Arab World" in *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 71-92.

21 The conceptual investigations into these sources of legitimacy, referring to the work of political scientists such as David Easton, David Apter, amongst others, as well as to later work on 'rentier states', are too numerous to list here. But see the magisterial contribution by M. Hudson, *Arab Politics: the Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and, on the Gulf in particular, Gause, *Oil Monarchies*, op. cit; and Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

22 Apart from the available range of existing literature and specialist reporting, and discussion within the Gulf2000 Network, these assessments are based on a series of formal and informal interviews with academic and other observers and actors in each of the GCC states in the course of several visits between 1997 and 2000.

23 See Joe Stork, *Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain* (Washington: Human Rights Watch Middle East, 1997). This contains a response by the Bahraini authorities. It should be noted that since the accession of Emir Hamad, a softening in government policy in 1999 led to a reduction in tensions even before the democratising reforms of 2000.

24 Amnesty International Report 2001 (London, 2001); US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000* (Washington, US Department of State, 2001); Human Rights Watch Middle East, <http://www.hrw.org/mideast>.

25 The best recent study on the issue of human rights and Islam is Katerina Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights* (London: IB Tauris, 1998).

26 For instance Haifaa Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam: an Authentic Approach* (London: Macmillan, 1997); and Mai Yamani, *Feminism and Islam: legal and literary perspectives* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996).

27 A good, if brief, recent comment on the Saudi judicial system is "Cruel, or just unusual? Saudi Arabian justice", in *The Economist*, 16 June 2001, pp. 65-66. See also US State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights 2000*, "Saudi Arabia."

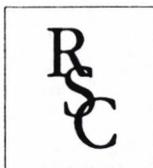
28 Private conversations with Saudi and other GCC nationals in each of the GCC countries, 1998-1999.

29 *Communication from the Commission... COM(2001)252 final*, p. 9.

30 See Amnesty International Report 2001, p. 206.

31 Gerd Nonneman, "A Future for Gulf Studies in Europe? The EU-GCC project in Regional Studies, and the possibilities and pitfalls of EU-GCC university cooperation", paper presented to the Conference on Gulf Studies, Exeter University, July 1999. Updated 2001 version available from the author at g.nonneman@lancaster.ac.uk.

- 32 European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252
final.
- 33 See *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252 final, pp. 13-17; and
European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document: Report on the
implementation of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights in 2000*
(Brussels: European Commission, 22 May 2001 (SEC(2001)801).
- 34 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252 final, p. 13.
- 35 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)801, p. 6.
- 36 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252 final, p. 14.
- 37 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252 final, p. 16.
- 38 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)801, pp. 9-32.
- 39 Specific issues of concern would be the position of Shia and non-Muslim populations;
and the use of torture – often without official sanction. Common concerns would
include the treatment of the Arab population of Israel and the Occupied territories; and
an example of reciprocity would be a dialogue over the position of Muslim
communities in Europe.
- 40 See *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)252 final, p. 10.
- 41 This was a confidential *ad hoc* arrangement with the institution in question.
- 42 As proposed in “Reshaping European Policy in the Middle East and North Africa”,
Discussion Paper presented by the Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research/Centre for
Applied Policy Research, to the sixth Kronberg talks, Munich 26-28 October 2000, p.
13.
- 43 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)801, p. 14.
- 44 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)801, p. 31.
- 45 *Communication from the Commission...* COM(2001)801, p. 40.



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