The Impact of Saudi-Emirati Alliance and Coordination Council on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

M. Said bin Ali bin Marhoun Alhasani

Muscat. Oman

Abstract

The GCC presents a unique model of cooperation in the Middle East region and in the world. This cooperation and coordination was established in 1981 and went through long evolutional process that resulted in engagement of member states in actual and deep integration in different fields and levels. In spite of the contemporary and accelerated evolution of this Council; it has faced different issues and difficulties that threatened its permanence and sustainability, especially in view of the GCC crisis in which Gulf break among Qatar and its neighbours, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain — all U.S. partners — alongside non-Gulf Egypt. This crisis was the first manifestation of the fragmentation of the GCC and constituted the greatest threat to its continuation. It was followed by another and bigger threat to the Council's continuity, which was carried out by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, through their decision of the formation of joint cooperation committee between them. This research paper presents an investigational attempt to shed light on and review some of the prominent researches and literature that studied the GCC nature, its achievements, challenges and prospects, in addition to the literary review of the new alliance between Saudi Arabia and UAE and its expected effect on the GCC from the political analysts and experts' perspective. It was concluded that this alliance could be considered as threatening to the continuity of the GCC and could put the GCC's future at risk.

Keywords: Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi-Emirati Alliance, Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council.

The Impact of Saudi–Emirati Alliance and Coordination Council on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

M. Said bin Ali bin Marhoun Alhasani

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1981, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has been a turning point in Arab relations and a successful model for building an Arab border framework at the level of the Gulf region. The Council's idea emerged from the urgent need for cooperation among the six GCC member states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman since they are very similar in their political, economic, social and military systems and face nearly similar external threats and dangers (Alasfoor, 2007).

The GCC move towards joint cooperation aimed to pave the way towards a comprehensive union among these six countries in accordance with the GCC Statutes, which stressed the need for cooperation and integration among GCC states in an effort to achieve unity among them. This was reflected through the signed GCC charter in1981, through which it was stated that the fundamental objectives of this cooperation are to have coordination, inter-connection and integration between Member States in all fields, reinforcing ties between their people groups, figuring similar controls and laws in different fields, for example, economy, legislation, finance, trade, tourism, customs, administration as well as cultivating technical and scientific advancement in industry, agriculture, mining, water and animal assets, building up scientific research centers, setting up joint endeavors, and empowering collaboration of the private sector (Bojarczyk,2013).

In spite of the contemporary and accelerated evolution of this Council, which has been in existence for more than thirty five years, and all the economic and political agreements achieved, prosperity and the effective integration and cooperation frameworks, which left a strong impression that unity may succeed in the future especially in light of the similarity between these states; the council has faced different issues and was not free from challenges and difficulties that threatened its permanence and sustainability, especially what was observed in the last recent years (Abdullah et al., 2014).

One of the most important challenges that have had an effective impact on the Gulf Union since ancient times is the sovereignty of the states. As a result of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), it has been proven that states are still very sensitive to the issue of sovereignty and that any prejudice or encroachment upon such sovereignty threatens to aggravate cooperation or delay the signing of treaties and conventions, as has been clearly demonstrated since 1990s and specifically since 1995 when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa took power and Qatar has striven to escape from underneath the Saudi shadow (GCC'S leader), but this Qatari intention has always been confronted by the two Gulf large leading states, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who always tried to put Qatar back into its box (Starbird, 2018) .

Since then, disputes and disagreements between GCC's states have been clearly emerging and developing, ended up with the crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council on June 5, 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain severed diplomatic relations with neighboring Qatar and imposed sea, land and air blockade against it. This crisis was the first manifestation of the fragmentation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and constituted the greatest threat to its continuation (al-Ansari et al., 2018).
However, this crisis was followed by another and greater threat to the Council's continuity, which was done by the UAE and Saudi Arabia in December 2017, through the issuing of a decree by the UAE President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in December 2017 on the formation of a Joint Co-operation Committee, that is separated from the Gulf Cooperation Council and whose objectives were to cooperate in the military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields between the two countries only (Wintour, 2017).

According to many political analysts and experts, this alliance is believed to pose a strong threat to the continuity of the GCC Council, particularly as it threatens the basic principle of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is based on unity and integration among all Member States (Wintour, 2017). Therefore, this paper presents an investigational attempt to shed light on and review some of the prominent researches and literature that studied the GCC nature, its

achievements, challenges and prospects, in addition to the literary review of the new alliance between Saudi Arabia and UAE and its expected effect on the GCC from the political analysts and experts' perspective.

Research Objectives

In light of the requirement for more research and investigation on GCC perspectives, challenges and crisis, this paper aims to:

1) Identify the nature of GCC, its achievements and challenges.
2) Make an overview about the GCC crisis and its impact on the Council and its role in stimulating the Saudi-UAE alliance.
3) Investigate the nature of the Saudi-Emirati Co-ordination Council and its objectives.
4) Investigate the impact of the Saudi-Emirati alliance on the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The Nature of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Its Achievements and Challenges

The Gulf States wished to unify all of what aims to strengthen their interests and meet their will since the declaration of their independence from the British colonization. In May 1976, Shaikh Jaber al Ahmad began calling for the establishment of a GCC unit to achieve cooperation in all political, economic, educational and media fields. His call was the basic milestone which resulted in the rapid movement towards the forming and developing of the cooperation and coordination among the Gulf States (Alasfoor, 2007).

The idea of the ruler of Kuwait Shaikh Jaber al Ahmad developed during the Arab summit in Amman in 1979, where the ruler presented his vision and ideas to the leaders of the Gulf States and suggest some thoughts concerning the establishment of a Gulf unity group of the six countries, and in a meeting held in late 1980 in Saudi Arabia, this issue was officially discussed among the leaders of the Gulf States (Alasfoor, 2007).

A gathering of Gulf foreign ministers on February 4-5 1981 systematized the Kuwaiti recommendations, to set up a Cooperation Council of Arab Gulf States, which would give a framework for coordination, cooperation and

integration in social, cultural, political financial and economic affairs (Secretariat General, 2014).

Following a further meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Muscat, on March, 9-10, the member states' heads of the Cooperation Council held then first summit meeting in Abu Dhabi on May 25-26, 1981. On the first day of their summit the rulers endorsed the statues of the new Council (GCC) (Al-Shammari, 2012).

The similarities among GCC Member States has empowered the GCC to embrace unified positions towards political issues and dependent on neighborly standards, non-intercession in internal affairs, regard of sovereignty of each state over its regions and assets, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. That has presented much validity upon the GCC as a worldwide association assuming a vital role in this important territory of the world (Alasfoor, 2007).

Several achievements within Arab, regional, and international contexts have been achieved through this Council since its establishment to the recent date, such as : their important achievements in the field of external policy contribution to the termination of the Iraq-Iran War, their full support to the Kingdom of Bahrain at political, financial, security and defense fronts, following the events of February and March 2011, their role in supporting the integrity, stability and sovereignty of Iraq, alongside with their help to UAE in regards of the three UAE occupied islands issue and their requests to Iran to end its control of these three islands and go into direct transactions with the UAE or allude the issue to the International Court of Justice (Secretariat General, 2014). Moreover, the GCC States have built up an aggregate framework for relations with Iran receiving joint and fixed standards for dealing with Iran dependent on the neighborly standards, peaceful settlement of disputes and dismissing facto policies. Since its foundation, the GCC's have a clear position and reaction towards the Palestinian issue. They have always expressed their support to the Palestinian rights; criticizing and rejecting the forceful acts and policies against the Palestinian individuals as well as their role in supporting Syrian Arab

Republic to restore its authentic right in their territories possessed in 1967 by Israel, including Golan Heights (Al-Said, 2010).

Those political achievements beside many other economic and financial ones including the establishment of free-trade zones in 1983 in which services and goods are excluded from tariffs and customs , the formation of the GCC's customs union in 2008 with mutual policy and strategy on international trade tariffs, the foundation of joint GCC market where the means of production – including capital and labor – are able to move freely between member states, and finally the full collaboration in all financial , economic and financial strategies and policies through which organizations, economic measures and legislation were set up for the last dimension – a common currency, which crowns the totally cooperation endeavors of the member countries (Abdullah et al., 2014).

The GCC Crisis and Its Role in Stimulating the Saudi-UAE alliance

Qatar's foreign policy since 1995 has been characterized by dynamism, flexibility and maneuverability, giving it the ability to find balanced relations with the most regional and international powers. Qatar has established strong relations with the United States of America, hosted many US military bases in the region and opened up to many international initiatives and conferences that are becoming part of the policy tools it uses (Doumar et al., 2017).

Since the mid-1990s, Qatari trends, particularly in foreign and media policies, have been a source of inconvenience to some governments and have caused tensions and conflicts in their relations over the past two decades, particularly with Saudi Arabia (Zahlan, 2016).

However, in recent times, Qatar according to GCC states, with its rapid and reckless actions and steps have caused many problems for the GCC. Many of Qatari steps and strategies have brought problems and threatened the national and regional security of the Gulf region. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the two big powers in GCC, became aware of the importance of taking firm measurements and actions to bring Qatar back to normal as a hypothetical subsidiary country that would not challenge the

leading role of Saudi Arabia in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf region, nor try to compete with the United Arab Emirates on a regional situation (Doumar et al., 2017).

The year 2013 presents a pivotal point in Qatar's foreign policy. The revolutionary tide began to wane as a result of the mistakes and failures of the revolutionary forces and the violence of the regimes, especially the Syrian regime, the Islamists' mistakes in governance in Egypt and the aspiration of the military to return to power and the complexities of the Arab political and social situation. This phase was known as the counter-revolution phase led by the emirates and Saudi Arabia, which held Qatar responsible for attempting to thwart its attempts to turn the clock back to the vision and to eliminate what was resulted from the Arab Spring (Abdullah et al., 2014).

In March 2014, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar because of Doha's non-compliance with previously agreed decisions of the Gulf Cooperation Council, most notably the country's position on isolating former president Morsi after the events of June 30, and the support of the State of Qatar for what they saw as chaos and instability in the region , as well as the Qatari government's relations with the banned and extremist Muslim Brotherhood from the Saudi-Emirati point of view and the failure of the State of Qatar to fight terrorism but rather funding it and giving violent groups space forums to express their ideas, alongside with the nature of Qatari relations with Iran (Abdullah et al., 2014).
These conflicts was ended up lately with what was known as the crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council, on June 5, 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain severed diplomatic relations with neighboring Qatar and imposed sea, land and air blockade against it. This crisis was the first manifestation of the fragmentation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and constituted the greatest threat to its continuation (Kabalan, 2018).

This long Qatar dispute throws the future of Gulf Cooperation Council into doubt, especially when UAE announced the new military and political alliance with Saudi Arabia on December 2017, the alliance that aimed to form

the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council which would bring the friendly ties between the two nations to new heights, especially cooperation in all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields, as well as in other areas (Wintour, 2017).

The Saudi–Emirati Co–ordination Council and Its Objectives

After the Saudi-Emirati alliance and partnership announcement, the two nations set up the Saudi-Emirati Council on May 2016 to merge the close relations and to escalate bilateral collaboration through consistent coordination and consultation in several areas and fields, and recently, a joint vision for military, developmental, economic and financial incorporation through 44 strategic ventures was uncovered during the first meeting of the council (Wam, 2018).

The Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council would bring the friendly ties between the two countries higher than ever, particularly their cooperation in all military, political, financial, and social fields, as well as in other fields (Wam, 2018).

The UAE President, His Highness Sheik Khalifa canister Zayed Al Nahyan, issued an announcement in December 2017 on the development of Co-operation Committee, whose targets were expressed as being the merging of the current solid bilateral ties between the UAE and Saudi Arabia and serving the basic interests of the two nations on improving cooperation on vital regional and international issues (The National, 2018).

The UAE and Saudi Arabia have shared profound rooted brotherly ties. The two nations have a solid record of cooperating to encourage improvement and battle vital local and worldwide issues. The UAE and Saudi Arabia took the first step to accelerate joint co-operation with the first meeting of the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council in Jeddah (The National, 2018).

The meeting, led by Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, illustrated the council's hierarchical structure and strategy . This council's strategy aims to make an exceptional model of combination and cooperation between the two

nations through the usage of joint projects that will upgrade prosperity and contentment of the population of the two nations (Henderson, 2018).

The Saudi and Emirati governments officials worked for 12 months in order to outline three main pillars for the joint cooperation, which are: human and knowledge, economic and political, security and military. Those pillars and other cooperation's objectives and projects were planned to be done within a timeframe of five years from the signing of the joint cooperation decree (Henderson, 2018).

For the economic pillar, the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council aims for launching the arrangement of empowering the banking sector to empower the banks' branches in the two nations to upgrade their business and advantage from the available development opportunities, and encourage work procedures in the two nations, trading of experiences in the field of financial innovation to recognize opportunities and challenges, sharing experiences in the insurance sector to enhance and bolster insurance markets in terms of products and regulatory mechanisms (The National, 2018).

Moreover, regarding the human and knowledge pillar, the coordination committee aims to create an integrated and effective instructive framework for the two nations to prepare and graduate qualified generations of citizens. It concentrates on the accompanying fields: technical education, public education, research cooperation and higher education. Finally, for the Political pillar, the cooperation in the political, security and military pillar purposes to improve integration and keep up the sovereignty of the two countries regionally and internationally (The National, 2018).

The Impact of the Saudi-Emirati Alliance on the Future of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

According to Saudi Arabia and Emirate perspectives, the Saudi- Emirati alliance and Coordination Council, uniting two imperative member nations of the GCC, will additionally advance the mission of the GCC by serving more adequately the people groups of the two countries and by conveying greater prosperity to the region, contributing to the stability and peace of the region,

which would be clearly recognized by the international community (Wam, 2018).

However, political experts and analysts considered that the announcement of a separate Saudi-UAE alliance would put the future of the GCC at risk, since it threatens the fundamental principle of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is based on unity and integration among all Member States (Sputnik, 2017).
According to Henderson (2018): "The new council is probably the death knell of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), established in 1981 as a mechanism to safeguard the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf from becoming embroiled in the Iran-Iraq war, which had started the year before and was going to continue until 1988."

Moreover, and according to the Guardian report, it was stated that the new alliance makes the future of the GCC, which is 36 years old, dubious, as it will be seen as an alternative, if not a replacement to the Gulf Cooperation Council, which has become paralyzed (Wintour, 2017).

The idea that the new Saudi-UAE committee is bound to be seen as an alternative, if not substitute, to the GCC was also supported by the political analyst Atwan (2018), who believed that the first meeting of the Saudi-Emeriti Coordinating Council in Jeddah in 2018 was held in order to strengthen the alliance of the two countries against the State of Qatar, and to achieve complementarity between the two countries which represent a launch of a bullet of mercy on the Gulf Cooperation Council as a closed alternative, and thus forbidden to the other four States, which also form a unity that is less than a merger unit and more than a confederation.

Analysts agree ultimately that the negative aspects of this alliance will be greater than its advantages. This new partnership bears an indication of the beginning of the end of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and gives other countries the freedom to pursue their own policies and agendas. Experts also believe that other GCC members are likely to be forced to make similar bilateral agreements and that this Saudi- Emirati alliance would double the

dispute with Qatar leading to the totally fragmentation of GCC in the future (Sputnik, 2017).

Conclusions

The GCC presents a unique model of cooperation in the Middle East region and in the world. This cooperation and coordination was established in 1981 and went through long evolutional process that resulted in engagement of member states in actual and deep integration in different fields and levels including economic, political and financial levels. In spite of the contemporary and accelerated evolution of this Council, which has been in existence for more than thirty five years, it has faced different issues and was not free from challenges and difficulties that threatened its permanence and sustainability, especially what was observed in the last recent years.

The GCC has been under intense strain in view of the Gulf break among Qatar and its neighbours, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain — all U.S. partners — alongside non-Gulf Egypt. This crisis was the first manifestation of the fragmentation of the GCC and constituted the greatest threat to its continuation. However, this crisis was followed by another and bigger threat to the Council's continuity, which was carried out by the UAE and Saudi Arabia in December 2017, through the decision of the formation of a joint cooperation committee between these two GCC's countries only, which in turn constituted a great significant step from the two countries in the adoption of an alternative alliance between them that could substitute the six gulf countries cooperation (GCC).

It was concluded that this alliance could be considered as threatening to the continuity of the GCC and could put the GCC's future at risk. This was due to the fact that this bilateral alliance threatens the fundamental principle of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is based on unity and integration among all Member States. However, the nature of this Council and its real impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council is still unknown, and its answer requires waiting to see what the Union will bring to the region of the pros and cons.

References

1) Abdullah, J., Al Hassan, O., Alshihaby, G., Abdulqader, Kh., Alajmi, Z., Alzahrani, Y., Al Tamamy, S., Hassan, I., Alazdi, A., Al-Farra, T., & Hussain, J. (2014). Gulf Cooperation Council's Challenges and Prospects. AlJazeera Center for Studies. Retrieved from: http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/2015/03/201533073446179915.html
2) Al-Ansari, M., Baabood, A., Collins, G., Des Roches, D., Dunne, Ch., Harb, I., Jahshan, Kh., Kabalan, M., Kharroub, T., Macaron, J. & Ulrichsen, K. (2018). The GCC Crisis at One Year: Stalemate Becomes New Reality. Arab Center Washington DC. Retrieved on January 13, 2019 from: http://arabcenterdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/The-GCC-Crisis-at-One-Year-Stalemate-Becomes-New-Reality.pdf
3) Alasfoor, R. (2007). The Gulf Cooperation Council: its nature and achievements. Department of Political Science, Lund University.
4) Al-Said, N. (2010). The GCC: Cooperation and development in a new world order (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff).
5) Al-Shammari, A. (2012). The Cooperation Council for the Gulf States (GCC) and the Challenge of Unity. Master thesis, Middle East University.
6) Atwan, A. A. (2018). Why do we believe that the new Saudi-Saudi Coordinating Council will launch a mercy bullet on the GCC? Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://www.raialyoum.com/index.php/%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84/
7) Bojarczyk, B. (2013). The Gulf Cooperation Council–regional integration mechanism. Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, sectio K–Politologia, 20(1), 69.

8) Doumar, G., Gurbuz, M., Harb, I., Jahshan, Kh., Kharroub, T., Macaron, J., Montgomery, M., Munayyer, Y., Al-Qassab, A., & Ziadeh, R. (2017). Crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council: Challenges and Prospects. Arab Center Washington DC. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Crisis%20in%20the%20Gulf%20Cooperation%20Council%20-%20booklet%20by%20ACW.pdf

9) Henderson, S. (2018). New Arab Gulf council reflects shift in strategy, leadership. THE HILL. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://thehill.com/opinion/international/391431-new-arab-gulf-council-reflects-shift-in-strategy-leadership

10) Kabalan, M. (2018). The Gulf Crisis: The US Factor. Insight Turkey, 20(2), 33-50.

11) Secretariat General (2014). The GCC: Process and Achievement. The Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf Information Affairs Sector, 8th Ed., Riyadh.

12) Sputnik (2017). The beginning of the end ... A Saudi-Emirati move threatens the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/201712071028202676-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A/

13) Starbird, J. (2018). Crisis in the GCC: Causes, Consequences & Prospects. Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University Qatar. Retrieved on January 13, 2019 from: https://cirs.georgetown.edu/community-outreach/crisis-gcc-causes-consequences-prospects-0

14) The National (2018). **Saudi-Emirati Co-ordination Council**: **all you need to know**. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/saudi-emirati-co-ordination-council-all-you-need-to-know-1.737773

15) Wam, (2018). Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council brings ties to new heights. Khaleej Times, Saudi Arabia. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/region/saudi-arabia/saudi-emirati-coordination-council-brings-ties-to-new-heights

16) Wintour, P. (2017). UAE announces new Saudi alliance that could reshape Gulf relations. The Guardian, Retrieved on January 13, 2019 from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/05/uae-saudi-arabia-alliance-gulf-relations-gcc

17) Zahlan, R. S. (2016). The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Routledge, London.