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The Future of the GCC and the Possibility for Persistence

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Introduction

The focus on international gatherings of states has increased over time as issues that transcend borders, such as terrorism, global epidemics, and refugees become more and more critical and require collective action. The increasing complexity of some of these issues often requires a unity of state efforts and resources over time to address. Some issues may be resolved, others mitigated, and still others require ongoing endeavors.

The 2017 Gulf Crisis renewed local, regional, and international attention to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an international organization established in 1981 and comprised of six member states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The situation prompted scholars, pundits, and members of the media alike to ask if the organization would persist under the pressures of the disagreements. Yet questioning the organization's durability over a single issue – albeit an important issue – disregards many of the other matters that are addressed by the organization. These matters include the cooperation on regional strategic issues, enhancing a common security framework through a unified military command and defense system, and moving forward on many economic collaborations and integrations. It is the success of unity and integration in these other matters that provide a useful motivation for member states to ensure the perpetuation of the GCC.

I believe that the GCC, a strategic necessity, can indeed persist by adjusting various policies to meet today's issues. In this article, I first discuss the beneficial aspects of international organizations that encourage the

persistence of international organizations. I then offer some areas on which the GCC may adjust or focus to encourage the durability of the organization. These areas include: (1) a recommitment to various international principles and norms under international law, (2) a formalization of those recommitments, and (3) the strengthening of a dispute settlement mechanism.

Benefits and Persistence

The benefits of international organizations begin with the idea that organizations are a forum under which states may meet collectively for diplomatic communication. The organization enhances transparency and reduces asymmetric information (Keohane 1984), decreases transaction costs (North 1990), and provides opportunities for issue linkages when concluding agreements. These institutionalized communication structures reduce uncertainty in a state's decision-making, thus increasing the likelihood of informed and favorable decisions (Young 1992). The very existence of the organization increases the shadow of the future through iterated meetings and reciprocity (Axelrod 1984; Oye 1986), thus yielding joint gains to member states that they otherwise would not have been able to achieve by themselves (Stein 1982).

Beyond simply rational-choice reasons for institutional persistence, international organizations can be an expression of its member states' collective identity, a shared community of norms and values that are shared within and expressed throughout (Risse-Kappen 1995, 1996). Continuity of that shared identity is important to the organization's members (Duffield 1992).

The persistence of an international organization often depends on its ability to adapt to the common challenges and opportunities available in today's increasingly complex world. That ability to adapt to change rests in the hands of its member states. Because it is far less costly to maintain an international organization than to build an entirely new one (Keohane 1989), it would be beneficial both in the short-term and in the long-term to members to adapt various processes, policies, and procedures to meet the members' shared concerns and interests (Boyer 1993).

GCC and Persistence

The GCC is already successful in many areas by creating joint gains for its members. It has provided a plethora of economic opportunities through its customs union and movement towards a common market. Despite the recent disruption of flows, the infrastructure of that union is in place and plans to further the efficiencies of the union and expand the common market applications are in place, including improvements in areas of transportation, water, and energy (specifically, electricity). More economic opportunities may be in reach as the GCC members coordinate on their similar Vision plans and on a collective security apparatus to, at minimum, ensure a stable trade route to and from GCC states.

Ignoring these multiple areas of success (economic, security, and infrastructural) may lead scholars and members of the media to decry the organization's relevance in the face of the 2017 Gulf Crisis. Yet it is precisely these successes that may motivate the GCC to become more relevant in the face of these other pressures (Hellmann and Wolf 1993). The question is: where should the GCC begin?

At the thirty-ninth Gulf Cooperation Council summit, the Kuwaiti

Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah emphasized the restoration of the GCC's previous spirit and encouraged unity among its members (Arab Times 2018). At the end of the summit, the members issued a statement about the importance of maintaining unity (Reuters 2018). This emphasis on returning to the basic motivation for the unity may reveal a useful starting point: perhaps the members should revisit some of the basic international principles, international norms, and the policies of the GCC Charter to see which elements should be enhanced or modified.

Re-Commitments. First, it may be helpful to enhance unity by reiteration of commitment to various principles and norms under international law. These include:

- ***Diplomacy and Direct Dialogue:*** The United Nations Charter encourages the peaceful settlement of international disputes (UN Charter Art. 2, Sec. 3), which may be achieved through maintaining diplomatic relations and direct dialogue between countries. A re-commitment to utilizing these tools of peace may yield a "good faith" step towards de-escalation of tensions. Indeed, the use of diplomacy and direct dialogue can lead to greater cooperation between and compliance of member states (Chayes and Chayes 1995).

- ***Transparency:*** The norm of transparency between states (Bianchi 2013), and the re-affirmation of that norm between GCC members, also may assist in yielding good faith between members. If GCC members are transparent with one another about issues, concerns, and opportunities, then effective resolutions may be more readily concluded.

- ***Respect for Domestic Sovereignty:*** The United Nations Charter notes that all states have sovereign equality (Un Charter, Art. 2, Sec.1). Indeed, sovereignty is a principle of international law. Respect for sovereignty and abiding by non-interference is crucial to

developing peaceful relations among states (Mazilu 2001).

Formalization. Secondly, the reiteration of those commitments may be formalized by adding them into the GCC Charter. These additions are already commitments made by the member states in other treaties and agreements, and thus, the re-affirmation of these principles and norms in the GCC Charter provide a united, continued allegiance to these aspects of international law.

Dispute Settlement. Thirdly, the GCC Charter's substantive articles may require re-visitation to align with today's challenges. One of those challenges is the reality that all states do not agree all the time – states may disagree, and states may enter into disputes with one another. Currently, the Charter has a dispute settlement mechanism in place (Art. 10), but it is *ad hoc* and its recommendations are non-binding. There may need to be a permanent body in place for state-to-state disputes, or perhaps policies and / or procedures that are binding. The former idea of a permanent body may indeed emerge over time, as greater collective opportunities within the GCC may require numerous and consistent legal clarifications. The latter idea, however, is much more difficult, as creating binding policies and / or procedures must carefully balance the concepts of international justice and resolution on one hand and the principle of respect for domestic sovereignty on the other.

Conclusion

The purpose of establishing an international organization does not remain static over time. As the years pass, an organization evolves to meet new challenges and engage with new opportunities. The international organization's purpose develops over time and its tasks and institutions are modified and / or increase. Multiple

international organizations have gone through this experience of development, including the European Union, which started out as the European Coal and Steel Community. The Gulf Cooperation Council is no different in that it has already begun by adding tasks and institutions over time, including the GCC Commercial Arbitration Center (1995) and the GCC Standardization Organization (2001). The GCC can continue on this path of development to address higher level concerns. The GCC's successes in other arenas (economic, security, and infrastructural arenas) may be its primary motivation to re-visit various policies and enhance or adjust them to encourage unity and ensure its continuity in the future.

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