

A MONTHLY REVIEW OF EURO-GULF RELATIONS

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MBS IN ASIA MYTHS AND REALITY

Pompeo's Timeline A Recap



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (MBS), has recently made an important trip to Asia visiting, in this order, Pakistan, India and China. Much has been speculated on the reasons behind this visit. Several international media outlets have gone as far as suggesting that Saudi Arabia is now moving closer to the proverbial East and away from the West as a result of criticism from the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) with regards to Saudi Arabia's handling of the war operations in Yemen and the Khashoggi

affair. Such conclusions, however, lack a specific understanding of what is at stake for Saudi Arabia in Pakistan, India, China, and wrongly underestimate the depth of the relationship Riyadh maintains to Washington which, is both dynamic and ironclad. Pakistan | Pakistan is a long-standing ally of Saudi Arabia. Military and intelligence ties between the two countries are deeply rooted and date back to the early 1980s. The historic bond between Riyadh and Islamabad was certainly reinforced by the recent election of Imran Khan as Pakistan's Prime Minister.

Khan was one of the most important leaders who attended the conference on trade and investment organised by Saudi Arabia and nicknamed "Davos in the Desert." Consequently, Saudi Arabia agreed to concede a \$6 billion (USD) bail out to ease Pakistan's economic woes, thus cementing the MBS-Khan friendship. Saudi Arabia's willingness to economically support Pakistan has not corresponded to the level of military backing Riyadh hoped to receive from Islamabad. For instance, in the fight against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, the Saudi

On December, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo toured US allies in the Middle East to reassure Washington's allies about the continued support of the US President Donald Trump, while reiterating the policy of closing ranks to confront Iran. The tour consisted of nine countries, including Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. His visit to the Middle East comes at a critical time, amid Donald Trump's announcement, in early January, of his intention to withdraw the nearly 2 000 US troops stationed in north-eastern Syria. The announcement created incredulity and concern around the region, as US allies fear that Iran troops will fill the vacuum left by US forces, thus consolidating and expanding Tehran's grip on the country. Other issues discussed included the Qatar crisis, and the war in Yemen, emphasising the urgency of finding a solution. On 08 January, the US Secretary started his tour to the Middle East with the first stop in Jordan where he met with the Jordan's King Abdullah II and Crown

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THE REPORT

UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals to Guide Bahrain into the Future

The event was held on March 15 2019 at the EGIC HQ in Rome. More information are available at www.egic.info

Reducing dependence on oil is the main focus of the new economic strategies developed by countries across the Arab Gulf. Such strategies are embodied by the Vision 2030 programmes already under way in most countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In the case of Bahrain, a sustainable development and economic growth model, as promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is complementary to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy and can positively impact future plans aimed at improving the lives of ordinary citizens. To explore the extent in which UNPD guidelines inform Bahrain's government action, the Euro-Gulf Information Centre invited Dr. Omar Al-Ubaydli, the Program Director for International and Geo-Political Studies at Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (DERASAT), Associate Professor of Economics at George Mason University and, previously, a Visiting Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago. UNPD reports look beyond traditional purely eco-

nomical data such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and industrial output indicators. Local UNDP offices are well known for looking carefully into the countries' specific features, considering all variables, including the environmental and societal dimensions, and all other aspects bearing a considerable impact on the quality of life. Bahrain's economy is in itself quite unique. Bahrain is an island state of which large portions are covered by the desert. As such avoiding to overexploit land

resources is crucial. Another important characteristic is the socio-economic impact of expatriate workers, a feature Bahrain shares with other GCC economies. Out of a population of 1.6 million, around 75% of the workforce is made up by foreigners on short term visas. This allows Bahraini businesses to hire workforce only when needed for specific projects, thus reducing the pressure to find new strategies and invest on innovation. Bahrain's exports are still largely reliant on oil, constituting

some 80% of government revenues. This became increasingly problematic as after 2014 the oil price experienced a sharp decrease, ending Bahrain's trade surplus and adding pressure on the currency. In Bahrain, energy overconsumption, a common problem in energy producing countries with highly subsidised energy prices, constitutes a serious economic and environmental concern. In addition, land reclaiming projects, often needed to sustain Bahrain's growing population, have damaged the environment in the past. On the other hand, Bahrain presents unique opportunities. Manama launched its Vision 2030 programme as early as 2008 in an attempt to attract foreign investments, develop the private sector and reduce dependency on oil. It was the first Gulf country understanding the need for a comprehensive economic diversification plan and the only GCC economy to commence diversification before the oil prices started to fluctuate in an unpredictable manner. Similarly to most small states, Bahrain is responsive to coopera-



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BAHRAIN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2018

Pathways to Sustainable Economic Growth in Bahrain



tion with UN agencies such as the UNDP and is keen to further develop regional cooperation. The result of such cooperation is well represented by the common GCC power grid which increases efficiency while reducing waste and consumption. Notably, as a result of the diversification efforts, Bahrain is performing increasingly well in the Information and Communication Technology and the Islamic Finance sectors. The King-

dom is also remarkably ahead of its GCC partners in terms of gender equality, an indicator of the UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals which is regarded as key by Bahrain's authorities to minimise the loss of economic opportunity. Despite Manama's increasing commitment to UNDP guidelines for economic development, there are still areas to improve to ensure Bahrain can overcome current and future financial

turbulences without over-exploiting its resources and damaging the environment. Following the 2011 unrest, which was initially triggered by economically-related grievances, government efforts should aim at providing opportunities for the youth. The expansion of the already existing youth programmes is therefore recommended. Al-Ubaydli argued that this should go hand in hand with the development of new sectors of the economy linking the traditional export of natural resources to the needs of technological advancements, infrastructure development and oil derivatives for example, to secure a higher employment rate. Bahrain would also benefit from further GCC economic integration and the expansion of accessible markets. A comprehensive European Union-GCC trade deal and the resolution of the Qatar crisis are therefore two potentially beneficial outcomes. Education is likely to play a pivotal role to ensure the sustainable advancement of Bahrain's economy: by investing on education on the basis of a skill-gap analysis to inform future generations on the skills and expertise



Omar Al-Ubaydli, Director of Research at Derasat

that are needed by the local business community, the government could provide stimulus to economic growth. However, it is important that such growth is coupled with economic policies that are conceived with an environment sensitive approach, to safeguard the quality of life of ordinary Bahrainis and highly reduce the risks related to environmental emergencies.

BY ANTONINO OCCHIUTO

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THE MONITOR

Militias in and against the Kingdom of Bahrain

Part I

Part II is available at www.egic.info/mapping-militia-bahrain-part-two

Infiltration by Iranian proxies is among of the most potent challenges currently facing Bahrain—and it is an enduring challenge. Since the mid-19th century, Iran has been attempting to forcibly absorb Bahrain into its administrative body. Referring to Bahrain as its ‘14th province,’ the Islamic Republic deploys its proxy agents to destabilise Bahrain’s government and attack its civil society. In fact, ‘most, if not all, the internal militarised groups fighting against Bahrain’s government and civil society are connected to, and directed from, Iran.’ Since 2011, Iran has intensified its support for an assortment of Shia militias in Bahrain and smuggles more and more to camps in Iran and Iraq where their operatives receive training by Tehran-backed terrorist groups such as Kata’ib Hezbollah under the patronage of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC). Those operatives are then reinserted into Bahrain often with military and command and communications equipment. With war raging in several parts of the Middle East, it is striking that Iranian engagements tend to be with aims that go beyond the theatre of their operations and their political-military leadership often equates battlefield ‘victories’ in one location as steps towards Iranian ‘victories’ in others. Consider that, after

claiming military victory in Aleppo (December 2016), the Deputy Commander of the IRGC, General Hossein Salami, publicly declared that ‘the victory in Aleppo will pave the way for liberating Bahrain,’ and assured

intervention by Iranian forces; ultimately delegitimise, overthrow and replace Bahrain’s government. In June 2017 Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain collectively designated the fol-

tary organisations whose primary political objective is to overthrow Bahrain’s government and its royal family. The MWHB therefore serves as an umbrella organisation and the linchpin between Bahrain’s



that ‘the people of Bahrain will achieve their wishes, the Yemeni people will be delighted, and the residents of Mosul will taste victory, these are all divine promises.’ In other words, Iran’s engagement in Syria is part of a larger attempt by Tehran to deploy militia and consolidate power across the Arab Gulf and, indeed, the Middle East. In the case of Bahrain, evidence is mounting that suggests that Iran deploys militias to attack both security personnel and civilians for the purpose of: polarising Bahrain’s civil society; deepening sectarianism in the country; paving the way for an armed insurrection; paving the way for direct

lowing Iran-backed, Shia paramilitary units operating in Bahrain as terrorist organisations:

- Hezbollah Bahrain,
- Saraya al-Ashtar
- February 14 Coalition
- The Resistance Brigades
- Saraya al-Mukhtar and
- Harakat Ahrar Bahrain.

In this Monitoring segment, the first two paramilitary organisations are introduced and assessed.

Hezbollah Bahrain | The Military Wing of Hezbollah Bahrain (MWHB) is one of the most notorious terrorist groups operating in Bahrain. Its primary role is to organise, supervise and provide support for other insurgent and paramili-

Shia militias and Tehran. There is no doubt regarding the nature of relationship between Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic it has been established that Hezbollah is an Iranian, extra-state, proxy advancing Iran’s regional and international objectives. It relies on Tehran for its financing, its military and political leadership, strategic assets, tactical choices and overall strategic objectives. Iran is Hezbollah’s principal financial sponsor. Although, widely known from its inception, this was confirmed by Hezbollah Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, in June 2016 when he noted that: ‘We are open about the fact that Hezbol-

lah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, are from the Islamic Republic of Iran.' The unambiguity of relationship between Hezbollah and Iran is cemented by Hezbollah's ideological framework, which is directly derived from the Khomeini's radical doctrine of Shia Islam and his thoughts centred on the idea of revolutionary violence which justify his understanding "defensive" jihad. Hezbollah follows a model of governance for an Islamic state, which is based on submission to the wilayat al-faqih, the rule of the jurisprudent, which was articulated by Khomeini. As Sheikh Naim Qassem confirmed in an interview with Fred Halliday, Hezbollah regards the Iranian spiritual leader as its ultimate authority. Hezbollah takes its orders directly from the IRGC and al Quds Force and is in frequent contact with their high command. The frequent contact is best illustrated by the popularity of IRGC al-Quds Force Commander, Qasem Soleimani, who became a social media celebrity among Hezbollah fighters, often being captured posing for Instagram pictures with Hezbollah and other Shia militia soldiers operating in various locations in the Middle East. Together with the IRGC, Hezbollah's task is to ensure survival of the regime in Tehran and to promote its revisionist ambitions which includes the strat-



egy of "revolution exportation." Bahrain is a central part of the Iranian attempt to spread its revolution into the Arabian Peninsula. MWHB is a branch of the wider Hezbollah framework and is responsible for untold death and destruction in Bahrain at the behest of military planners in Tehran. Al-Ashtar Brigades (Saraya al-Ashtar) | Since its premier statement — via their Facebook page — on 27 April 2013, the Iran-backed militant group Al-Ashtar has been responsible for carrying out numerous terrorist attacks — mostly detonating improvised explosive devices (IEDs) — against Bahrain's civilian population, security personnel and government representatives. According to Bahraini intelligence, the group has been trained by Kata'ib Hezbollah, an Shia militia that is one of Iran's most important proxies in Iraq. In January 2016,

Bahraini authorities arrested the leaders of a cell linked to Al-Ashtar—Ali and Mohammed Fakhrawi. The twin brothers travelled to Iran on several occasions to obtain financial and logistical support. Ali Fakhrawi met (in 2012) with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and received some €18,520 in support of their organisation. The organisation was blacklisted as a terrorist group by Bahrain's cabinet in March 2014 following a bomb attack that killed two policemen and an officer from the United Arab Emirates in the town of Daih. Al-Ashtar claimed responsibility for this attack on its Facebook and Twitter accounts declaring that 'The operation comes in revenge for our martyrs.' Together with Al-Ashtar the cabinet outlawed the February 14 Movement, Saraya al-Muqawama (Resistance Brigade) and any group associated or allied to them.

In March 2017, two of the group's affiliates Ahmad Hasan Yusuf and Al-sayed Murtadha Majeed Ramadhan Alawi were designated as global terrorists by the US State Department. In the statement officially announcing this declaration, US State Department recognised that Al-Ashtar receives funding and support from the Government of Iran. In February 2018, the group formally adopted the logo of the IRGC the branding that is shared by many Shia militias openly loyal to the Islamic Republic championing/promoting both Iran's radical ideology as well as its political interests. This change of its public "image" reflects the official inclusion in the "Iranian Axis of Resistance" operating against the United States and its allies.

BY LUCIE ŠVEJDOVÁ



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GULF MONITOR

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



Pompeo's Timeline

A Recap

FROM PAGE 1

Prince Hussein bin Abdullah. The discussion covered the US-Jordan strategic cooperation and Pompeo reassured Amman that the US withdrawal from Syria would not change the US position towards protecting the stability of its allies in the region. Amman expressed gratitude for Washington's support to Jordan in multiple development programmes to prevent the escalation of an economic crisis triggered by regional events. Mr Pompeo's next stop took place on 09 January, in Iraq, he met with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, Iraqi government figures and Kurdish officials. Iraq represents one of the key allies of the US in the region, mainly due to its geographical proximity to Iran. Mr Pompeo stated that the talks focused on Iraq's fight against a return of Daesh. He argued that Washington and Baghdad have a common understanding that the battle against Daesh, to counter Iran, is real and important. He added that: ISIS is defeated militarily, but the mission is not accomplished. The main concern of Iraq with regard to the US military withdrawal from Syria is that the reduction of American troops will affect regional security. On 10 January, Pompeo met with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in order to discuss economic and security concerns with regards to Washington-Cairo cooperation. Pompeo's choice to stop in Cairo and give a high-profile speech

on US policy in the region was highly symbolic, reminiscent speech given by former President Barack Obama in Cairo in 2009. The objective was likely to further underline differences between the Trump and Obama administration with regards to US policy in the Middle East. Pompeo's speech predominantly focused on 'confronting Iran's malign activities.' On 11 January, Mr Pompeo visited Bahrain, where, together with King Hamad, Crown Prince Salman bin Ahmad Al Khalifa and Foreign Minister Sheikh



Khaled bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, they discussed the importance of countering Iran and extremist groups. Pompeo pointed out that Manama is a key US Arab-Gulf ally and added: These Gulf partnerships are critical to achieving shared regional objectives – defeating ISI, countering radical Islamic terrorism, protecting global energy supplies and rolling back Iranian aggression. From Manama, Pompeo headed to the United Arab Emirates, on 12 January, to discuss the cohesion of

the Arab Gulf countries, particularly when it comes to the dispute with Qatar, and other Arab nations, to counter Iran. Pompeo met with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, accompanied by the Chief Executive and Managing Director of Mubadala, Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Dr Anwar Gargash, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed, the

National Security Advisor. As a part of Pompeo's Middle East tour, he arrived in Qatar on 13 January, where he touched upon the need to end the conflict between Doha and the other Arab Gulf allies. He stated: It is time for old rivalries to end for the sake of the greater good of the region. Pompeo then headed to Saudi Arabia on 14 January, where he met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The relationship between Washington and Riyadh remains delicate. The US Secretary of

State and the Saudi Crown Prince discussed women's rights and the fighting in Yemen, Pompeo discussed, at length, the necessity to achieve a political solution to the conflict. From Washington's point of view, the war expands resources and attention to focus on other regional issues, especially from the two leading members of the coalition, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The US reiterated support to Riyadh in its efforts to contain Iran. Finally, Pompeo visited Oman on 14 January, where he met with Sultan, Qaboos bin Said al Sai, to discuss their bilateral cooperation and common regional concerns. Pompeo emphasised the importance of the support provided by Oman to facilitate talks in order to terminate the war in Yemen. Even though, Mr Pompeo's tour in the Middle East initially included Kuwait, the Secretary of State cut it short due to a family funeral and returned back to Washington. We at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre will continue to monitor developments between Washington and its Middle Eastern allies, especially those impacting on regional peace, prosperity, stability and security. Secretary Pompeo's tour to the Middle East reflects the desire of the US to reassert itself despite the many polarising issues facing the region, and indeed the world.

BY JASMINA AMETI

MBS IN ASIA: MYTHS AND REALITY

FROM PAGE 1

Arabia-led Arab coalition is having to rely primarily on Western support. Inside Pakistan, Saudi Arabia retains an array of economic interests. The Crown Prince signed agreements in Islamabad for \$20 billion (USD) of investments, including an agreement to establish an oil refinery in the south-western coastal city of Gwadar. Strategically, the presence of Iran, Saudi Arabia's arch-rival in the Gulf and the wider Middle East, as Pakistan's neighbour is another reason why the Saudi leadership is keen to keep the closest possible level of cooperation with Islamabad. Gwadar is also a key part of the China-Pakistan economic corridor, intertwining the interests of Saudi Arabia and China. MBS is certainly working to ensure that Saudi Arabia becomes a key player in Gwadar's and Pakistan's future development, including to prevent Tehran's plan to join the China-Pakistan economic corridor through the construction of the planned Iran-Pakistan natural gas

pipeline. The pipeline, by exporting Iranian gas, would increase Tehran's leverage over Islamabad. India | MBS's visit to India must be carefully contextualised. It comes on the heels of the 2016 visit by India's Prime Minister, Narendra

Modi, to Saudi Arabia. That visit had already highlighted that the new economic realities worldwide could push Riyadh and New Delhi closer together. Saudi Arabia already provides around 20% of India's annual oil needs, critical for the country's economic growth. The importance of the Indian



owned oil giant, developing an important refinery and petrochemicals project in Ratnagiri. In relation to the Vision 2030 programme, MBS would also be interested in New Delhi's know-how with regards to technical and market expertise that contributed to India's economic growth. From the

perspective of India's private sector, MBS's efforts to render Saudi Arabia a more foreign-investment-friendly country is certainly attractive. Recently, India-Saudi cooperation also focused on issues related to defence and counterterrorism. Today, some three million Indians live in Saudi Arabia. Indian workers have long constituted an important labour force, instrumental to the development of the Saudi economy. Despite warming ties, the scope for India to increase its military involvement in the Gulf remains limited. Worsening relations with powerful neighbours such as China and Pakistan and the obsolete status of India's Air Force and Navy, make it impossible for New Delhi to aspire to a greater role in Gulf security affairs, for the time being. China | Speculations were most focused on the Crown Prince's visit to Beijing. These normally considered MBS's intentions as directed at finding alternatives to Saudi Arabia's partnership with Washington. However-

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er, as with the Islamabad and New Delhi legs, this visit should be understood in the context of specific China-Saudi common interests. China's President, Xi Jinping, is trying to push his Belt and Road initiative, under which huge amounts of Chinese trade would pass through the Gulf and the Red Sea en-route to Europe, and Saudi Arabia retains a key role as a transit area in that regard. The Crown Prince also wants to promote the Vision 2030 economic plan, which would surely benefit from Chinese investment and technology transfers. As such, Beijing and Riyadh signed a series of agreements in trade, en-

ergy and, crucially, the two agreed to specific steps of cooperation for both the Belt and Road and Vision 2030 projects. MBS also signed a \$10 billion(USD) refinery and petrochemical project deal. Even before the Crown Prince's visit and the signing of these new deals, China was already Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner. Each year, Beijing imports some \$46 billion (USD) from Saudi Arabia, including much need oil supplies. China however, enjoys a particularly close political and economic relationship with Iran. Beijing is unwilling to downsize such relationship, as demonstrated by

its staunch support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Shortly before receiving MBS, Xi Jinping had hosted Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite the fact that China is slowly beginning to increase its military presence in regions close to the Gulf— its Djibouti base is a clear example of such trend—Beijing remains, to date, unwilling to challenge or substitute US leadership in security affairs outside of East Asia. This and the Iran-China connection are enough to offset future prospects of Saudi Arabia edging further towards China and away from the West.

East Asia and the Indian subcontinent are the fastest growing economic spaces globally. Their relevance is therefore set in increase in all areas of the world and the Arab Gulf is no exception. The Euro-Gulf Information Centre will continue to monitor the status and the advancement of Gulf-Asia relations. To date, the new relationship is based on specific complementary economic interests while there is little to no appetite, even in countries with global ambitions such as China, to replace the US-led, Western role as a pillar of the Gulf's security architecture.

BY ANTONINO OCCHIUTO

ARTICLE REVIEW

THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION'S IMPACT ON POLITICAL ISLAM AND THE MIDDLE EAST

As Iran celebrated the 40th anniversary of its Islamic revolution—which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty and gave birth to the Islamic Republic—Emile Nakhleh, (former Senior Intelligence Service Officer and Director of the Political Islam Strategic Analysis Programme at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)), published, on Lobe Log, an article which looks at the impact that the revolution had in reshaping the Middle East. Using a subtle and careful approach, Nakhleh acknowledges some of Iran's nefarious activities in the region while arguing that Iranian foreign policy is largely a reaction to foreign provocations rather than an hegemonic design. The author's conclusions are unequivocal: he makes the case for Western pow-

ers to accept the new dominant position that Iran has carved itself in the region and engage with the Islamic Republic accordingly. In his analysis, Nakhleh points out to the legitimate fear that Iran's neighbours had with regard to the spread of the revolution. Such fear, for instance, motivated regional support for Iraq's military action against the Islamic Republic. However, It is more difficult to understand why the author links the fear of the revolution to a supposed 'revolutionary pro-democratic zeal appealing to Shia and Sunni Muslims globally', instead of pointing out to the more realistic risk of religion being used to mobilise the masses and overthrow governments in the Gulf and the wider region—in the same man-

ner it happened in Tehran. Worryingly, the author suggests that the Iranian revolution had a positive impact on political pluralism and democratisation across the Middle East. For instance, he supports his argument by adopting Lebanon as a case study, a country in which 'Hezbollah (Party of God), the only Iran-supported Shia political party, scored impressive electoral victories over the years and has remained, until this day, a major power-broker in Lebanese politics.' In this article, the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics is represented purely as a sign of democratic development. No attention is given to the fact that Iran financed the creation and development of the group as part of its plan to state-capture and control Leba-

non. Hezbollah is a political party with allegiance to Tehran's clergy rather than to the Lebanese people. Furthermore, it comprises a very well-armed militias which has been fighting wars in coordination with and directed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In the second part of his analysis, Nakhleh states that it was only when Saddam Hussein ordered Iraq's military to begin operations against Iran that the Islamic Republic forged 'relations with some unsavoury radical groups that were prone to revolutionary zeal and violence.' Such a statement, which is not backed up by further explanation, confuses the reader. The rising importance of the IRGC and the Basij within Iran, due to war time

necessity, is certainly a radicalising factor. However, this should not neglect that the Ayatollahs used the war to strengthen their position in Tehran and that they planned to export the revolution, across the Muslim world, even before Iraq's dictator ordered the attack. The author confirms the West's worst fears regarding Iran's relationship to some of the most infamous terrorist organisations, including: Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah (and its many franchises in Bahrain, Iraq and Saudi Arabia), Hamas, the Taliban and even Yemen's Houthis. Nakhleh, unexpectedly from a former US intelligence officer, endorses the Iran-terrorist cooperation and presents it as a self-defence strategy motivated by the need to counter the United States (US), Israel and Saudi Arabia. Arguably, this is a whole sale exaggeration. Moving on to how the West should confront Iran's current regional activities, the article does consider how Iran's intervention in Syria and Iraq was strictly related to Tehran's regional hegemonic plans and how the Syrian war ended with Iran supporting the suppression of the opposition by Syria's regime. Iran's involvement in Syria is therefore against any form of democratic



developments and in contrast to Western interests. Problematically however, the author concludes that attempting to roll-back Iran's influence in the Arab Levant is counterproductive. Nakhleh suggests that policymakers should overlook and accept Iran's involvement in the internal affairs of other countries, its support for sectarian militias in the Gulf and the wider Middle East and decries states to uphold the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). According to the author, the resolution of current regional crises, and preventing future crises, is related to the West's ability to coordinate

with and accommodate the interests of three key states: Iran, Israel and Turkey. Such an approach would relegate the aspirations of GCC states, which have been increasingly active regional players. Furthermore, it would legitimise Iran's sectarian and divisive agenda throughout the Arab Gulf and the Levant and external attempts aimed at weakening a number of Arab states in the region. Weak and fragile states present a number of characteristics which would favour new conflicts in the already war-torn Middle East. Regional turmoil across the Middle East and the resurgence of ethnic-based ter-

rorist and separatist groups within the Islamic Republic — both the Balochistan and Khuzestan regions have experienced a wave of terrorist attacks targeting Iran's security forces — are evidence that Tehran's sectarian agenda is detrimental to both regional stability and to the security of the people of Iran. Articles such as Nakhleh's, dangerously suggest cooperation with a regime that will continue to favour a status quo of turmoil for the foreseeable future.

BY ANTONINO OCCHIUTO

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

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

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

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

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