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# The Gulf Arab Countries' Foreign and Security Policies Post-Arab Uprisings: Toward Greater Regional Independence of the Middle East

Valentina Kostadinova

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GRM PAPERS

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GRM PAPER

# The Gulf Arab Countries' Foreign and Security Policies Post-Arab Uprisings: Toward Greater Regional Independence of the Middle East[1]

Valentina Kostadinova

## Introduction

The 2011 Arab uprisings triggered a process of profound transformation in the Middle East challenging many long-standing truisms and contributing to increasing trends of reorganization in international politics. Among others, two interrelated developments can be singled out. Firstly, the relative decline of the West. According to Gerges, the United States (US), the pre-eminent Western power post-World War II, "is no longer seen as omnipotent; and the Arab uprisings will most likely weaken American influence further."[2] Secondly, this creates space for non-Western actors, including Middle East actors, to play an important role in shaping the outcomes of the post-2011 processes. If, however, Middle East actors attain such a prominent role, the widespread tendency to explain events through allegations of foreign, often Western interference, will become more difficult to

1. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the Gulf Research Meeting in Cambridge in August 2014 and at the UACES Annual Conference in Cork in September 2014. I would like to thank the participants at the two events for their valuable feedback, comments, and questions.

2. F. Gerges, "The Obama Approach to the Middle East: the End of America's Moment?" *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 322.

sustain. An article in *Asharq Al-Awsat* by the Middle East commentator Al-Rashed illustrates this phenomenon well.[3] Undoubtedly, such predisposition towards finding some foreign interference is grounded in bitter historical experiences such as the overthrow of Mossadegh following a decisive US involvement. However, overreliance on explanations that underline the role of extra-regional forces poses the danger of the people in the region losing their sense of agency and avoiding responsibility about their countries' and their region's destiny. As Al-Rashed emphasizes, a distinction needs to be drawn between exploiting events to alter their path and outcome and triggering the events in the first place. Furthermore, he reminds us that countries have managed to rise out of ashes and no one has prevented them from being successful (Turkey being an appropriate example).[4]

Engaging with these issues, the paper explores the changing regional and international context of the Gulf Arab countries' foreign and security policies post-2011 uprisings. More specifically, the analysis focuses on the period before mid-2014, when the spectacular battlefield victories of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) marked a turning point in the post-uprising Middle East. It analyzes the foreign and security policies of the US and the European Union (EU) vis-à-vis the Arab Spring countries and compares them to those of the Gulf Arab countries.[5] The paper argues that in comparison to historical capabilities, at present Western ability to achieve its goals is much more restricted. On the other hand, the Gulf Arab countries have increased their abilities to attain their foreign and security aims. Thus, relatively speaking, the power of the Western actors has declined, while that of the Gulf Arab players has increased. The paper outlines an actor's major power facets, thus spelling out the key determinants that provide advantages in the Gulf Arab countries' foreign and security policies. Pursuing the theme of agency for the Middle East actors, the paper suggests an innovative conceptualization of power, focused on the actor's ability to have "a say" in the arrangements in its immediate environment. Thus, the emphasis is on whether the actors (i.e., the Gulf Arab countries) can determine their destiny without outside interference. Methodologically, the paper uses comparative analysis, employed along two main axes: historically, exploring the distribution of power after the end of World War I and at present; and secondly,

3. A. Al-Rashed, "Opinion: Conspiracy Theories that Will Not Die," *Asharq Al-Awsat,* February 25, 2014, http://www.aawsat.net/2014/02/article55329332 (accessed April 11, 2014).
4. Ibid.
5. The focus on the US and the EU allows the examination of two prominent Western players in the Middle East, which rely on different types of leverage. While the US is the leading military power with considerable financial resources, the EU is a novel type of actor, relying on normative power in its external relations.

scrutinizing the foreign policy capabilities of key contemporary players in the Middle East – the US, the EU, and the Gulf Arab countries. Thus, the paper contributes to current International Relations (IR) and Middle East Studies by providing a theoretically informed case-specific account of the changing structural realities in the international arena as a result of the increased foreign and security policy capabilities of the Gulf Arab countries.

To that end, the paper starts with the conceptualization of power and outlines the key determinants of the foreign and security capabilities of the actors under consideration. Secondly, it presents the historical perspective, describing the Middle East's capabilities post-WW I. This illustrates a region unable to determine its destiny. Thirdly, the paper studies whether the processes triggered by the Arab uprisings are the culmination of a trend towards greater regional independence by analyzing and comparing the policies and capabilities of the EU, US, and Gulf Arab countries post-Arab uprisings. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings.

## Determining One's Destiny without outside Interference – a Conceptualization of Power

This section aims to outline the concept of power used in the subsequent analysis and therefore briefly introduces key debates in political analysis on power, situating the following discussion within the wider meta-theoretical debates. The focus then turns on the IR debates about the concrete constitutive elements of power. The paper considers the contributions of key Realist and Liberal scholars establishing the distinction between hard and soft power and elaborates on the components of both hard and soft power. This sketches out the key facets of an actor's foreign and security policy capabilities and grounds the subsequent discussion.

What is power? Scholars have grappled with this question and attempted to find answers. Consequently, today multiple definitions exist, not only inspired by various meta-theoretical positions but also at times incompatible ones. Dahl provided the classic definition. He argued that A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.[6] Nye is one among many leading scholars who, echoing this view, maintains that power is the ability to get others to do what they would not have otherwise done.[7] Hay singles out two assumptions on which this understanding rests. Firstly, the actors involved have an

6. Cited in C. Hay, *Political Analysis: a Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 172.
7. J. Nye Jr., "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* 80, n. Autumn (1990): 154.

overt conflict of interests (they are aware of their preferences and know when they cannot attain them). Secondly, this definition is agency-centered; it is concerned with the actions of discrete entities.[8] Thirdly, this view conceives of power as a zero-sum relationship and one with coercive character (power over). The major strengths of this understanding of power are that it renders the object of analysis visible and easily classifiable.[9]

This definition, also known as the first face of power, soon came under attack as a narrow one. Instead, Bachrach and Baratz argued that: "power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social or political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A."[10] In other words, power is also exercised when an actor limits the decision-making to issues relatively safe for him/her.[11] This definition underscores the relative importance of the issues formally decided upon. However, an important continuity is that an overt conflict between the parties is still necessary. Thus, the assumption is that the actor's preferences are a reflection of his/her interests. So, both faces of power assume that when there is seeming consensus, no power is exercised.[12] Furthermore, both are actor-centered and concerned with power over something.

For some, like Lukes, this was still a narrow understanding. He argued that the actions and inactions implicated in the shaping of the perceived interests and political preferences should also be considered.[13] As he writes: "is it not the most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they see it as natural and unchangeable or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial."[14] This third face of power overcomes the other two's weaknesses. It points to the possibility of exercising power even when no overt conflict exists; it brings in the context as a consideration in the analysis of power relationships and moves towards overcoming

8. C. Hay, "Divided by a Common Language: Political Theory and the Concept of Power," *State of the Art* 17, no. 1 (1997): 46.
9. Ibid.
10. P. Bachrach and M. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1962): 948.
11. Ibid.
12. Hay, *Political Analysis,* 177-8.
13. S. Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* (2nd ed) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
14. Ibid., 28.

the focus on power as a zero-sum game.[15] Instead scholars, like Foucault, have insisted that power is also productive: it produces reality, domains of objects, and rituals of truth (power to).[16] A major criticism regarding the third face of power is its all-encompassing definition, which makes measuring power impossible and therefore, for some, difficult, even impossible to study. This is the position of scholars with positivist predisposition on ontological questions. Arguably, post-positivists have developed compelling accounts of how omnipresent power operates and can be studied. These, however, rest on epistemology and methodology very different from the ones accepted by the positivists, which has led to continuous debates about the best ways to study power.

Despite these important disagreements, a common trait is that the perspective is that of the powerful: the focus is on those that exercise power. This assigns secondary importance to the power recipients. Hence, in any analysis of the Middle East, the Western perspective was privileged. For a number of decades, the West has been the most powerful international player, and the leading analysts tended to be Westerners. To overcome this tendency, the paper analyzes power through the lens of an actor's ability to have a say in/influence the arrangements in its immediate environment. So, an actor is powerful if it can determine its destiny without outside interference. Of course, neutralizing outside influences completely is highly unlikely. Thus, in practice, it is always going to be a question of the degree to which outside factors interfere. This definition's major contribution is its inversion of the earlier viewpoint. It starts from the perspective of the entities that experience the exercise of power. The appreciation of the importance of the vantage point and the aim to consider the less powerful is consistent with the themes explored by the studies inspired by post-positivism. Simultaneously, given the underlying concern with the agency of Middle East actors, the emphasis in the subsequent analysis is agency-centered. From a meta-theoretical point of view, this means considering, above all, the first two faces of power. Overall, the conceptualization of power suggested here allows developing the analysis using traditional power measurements, while at the same time avoiding a Western-centered viewpoint.

The 2011 Arab uprisings triggered profound transformation in the Middle East environment. Given the region's strategic importance, multiple actors want to ensure that their voice is heard in determining the course of the events. The Gulf Arab countries are one such group of actors. Unlike the Western players (the US and EU),

15. Hay, *Political Analysis,* 179-82 for more details.

16. M. Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (2nd ed.) (London: Harvester, 1993), 73-4.

they are indigenous to the region. They belong to the Middle East geographically and share the language, religion, culture, some historical legacies, and many of the Arab Spring countries' (Tunisia, Libya, or Yemen) challenges. Therefore, the 2011 uprisings and the management of their outcomes were bound to figure prominently on the Gulf Arab countries' agenda engendering internal and external responses. The focus here is on the latter, in the contemporary world administered above all through a country's foreign and security policy. Through these policies, the Gulf Arab countries attempt to manage the transformative processes started in 2011 and thus, to determine their and their region's destinies. Policy implementation utilizes many instruments that ultimately rest on the constitutive elements of hard and soft power. They are the components determining the foreign and security capabilities of international actors, such as the US, the EU or the Gulf Arab countries, and are outlined in IR literature.

Hard and soft power obtained prominence through Nye's work distinguishing different ways for attaining one's goals.[17] He defines these terms as follows:

> "Soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will."[18]

Under Nye's definition, hard power is when coercion and threats are used. These include the use of force or the inducement of payments.[19] It grows out of a country's military and economic strength.[20] So, crucially under this definition, offering economic benefits constitutes an exercise of hard power. For its part, soft power is the ability to co-opt, rather than coerce; the ability to get "others want the outcomes that you want."[21] Soft power's big advantage is that its successful deployment avoids the need to use the potentially more costly carrots or sticks.[22] Nye maintains that soft power is an indirect way of getting what you want, which he refers to as the second

17. Most developed conceptually in Nye Jr., *"Soft Power"; and J. Nye, Jr., Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
18. J. Nye Jr., "Propaganda isn't the Way: Soft Power," *International Herald Tribune,* January 10, 2003, http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/publication/1240/propaganda_isnt_the_way.html (accessed April 13, 2014), 1.
19. J. Nye Jr., "The Benefits of Soft Power," 2004, http://home.comcast.net/~lionelingram/The%20Benefits%20of%20Soft%20Power.pdf (accessed April 13, 2014).
20. J. Nye Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 255-70, p. 256.
21. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* 5.
22. Nye Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," 256.

face of power. However, he also states that it rests on the ability to shape the others' preferences[23] – classified in political analysis as the third face of power. Nye does not address explicitly this inconsistent employment of contradictory faces of power in his development of the concept of soft power. However, despite his acknowledgement of the importance of aspects relevant to the third face of power, as will be shown, Nye's work is inspired above all by traditional understandings of key terms (i.e., his definition of power). Thus, his work is compatible with this study's ontological and epistemological assumptions privileging the first two faces of power.

Although the distinction between hard and soft power indicates the two basic options available for pursuing a country's foreign and security policy goals, a further dissection of the terms is needed for a comprehensive account of an actor's external capabilities. Nye's work outlines the aspects of soft power. The elements constitutive of an actor's hard power are outlined on the basis of Morgenthau's work. Although he does not use the term "hard power," given Nye's equation of hard power with the ability to coerce and Realists' privileging of armed strength,[24] the constitutive elements of national power outlined by Morgenthau are a good indicator of the factors leading to hard power. The most prominent among them are the country's geography, population, military preparedness, natural resources, industrial capacity, and the quality of its diplomacy and government.[25] The factors enabling the exercise of soft power include attractive personality, the actor's culture, political values and institutions, and policies perceived as legitimate. Soft power's deployment is facilitated through undertakings such as the establishment of offices providing information about the actor and its culture; foreign language radio/TV broadcasting; enabling multiple entities (not only governmental ones) to interact with foreign organizations, thus establishing a channel for presenting a variety of views (both governmental and private); credibility; convergence between words and policies.[26]

A few crucial points need to be emphasized. Firstly, as Nye underlines, hard and soft power are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary, often they are most effective when exercised together appropriately; what he terms "smart power."[27] Secondly, soft power has important limitations. It depends more than

23. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* 5.

24. H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* (7th ed) (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 31.

25. Ibid., 122-62 for more details.

26. J. Nye Jr., "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. March (2008): 94-109.

27. J. Nye Jr., "Get Smart," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2009): 160-3.

hard power on the existence of willing interpreters and due to the diffuse effects of its attraction, it tends to create general influence rather than easily observable specificaction.[28] Nevertheless, in the information age, soft power is becoming more, not less important:[29] "Today … the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. … technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population and raw materials are becoming less important."[30] Here Nye points to a fundamental shift in power's constitutive elements as a result of which a multidimensional distribution of power has occurred in the international arena. Thus, military, economic, and soft power are important but their distribution is more dispersed and unequal than in previous eras. In today's world, gains in one type of power (i.e., military) are more difficult to convert into another kind of power (i.e., economic).[31] For example, because of national consciousness, today a territory's military occupation does not necessarily mean that the occupier will be able to attain a relatively low cost economic advantage out of it.

So, in the early 21st century, power comes in many guises and is much more dispersed. Actors with limited power in the past are in a much better position to influence outcomes today. Arguably, this is the case for the Gulf Arab countries, which over the last fifty years have seen their power increase dramatically. Thus, today they have an important impact in shaping the outcomes in their immediate environment, such as in the Middle East post-2011 uprisings. As will be discussed, this sometimes happens in a context of diverging preferences between Gulf Arab and Western players. Nevertheless, at times, the Gulf Arab countries manage to attain some of their preferred outcomes. This is in stark contrast to the Middle East capabilities at the beginning of the 20th century (post-WW I).

## The Middle East post-WW I – a Region Unable to Determine its Destiny

This section shows the Middle East's inability to determine its destiny in the immediate aftermath of World War I, allowing an illuminating comparison between past and present regional capabilities vis-à-vis outside (Western) players and also instructive in highlighting the important shifts in the components of power determining an

28. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* 16.
29. Nye Jr., "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," 99.
30. Nye Jr., "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* 80, n. Autumn (1990): 153-71, p. 154.
31. Ibid., 158-9 and J. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* ch. 1.

actor's foreign and security policy capabilities. More specifically, the section outlines the post-WW I settlement in the Middle East analyzing how it became possible as a result of the overwhelming hard power of the West European colonial countries (Britain and France) and looks at the capabilities of the Arabian Peninsula.

As emphasized previously, the Middle East has often witnessed decisive extra-regional interference at crucial turning points, which have influenced its development in important ways. One very significant result of this phenomenon has been a heightened perception among the Middle East populations of an inability to decide their own destiny, which in turn has led to great sensitivity towards external involvements and susceptibility to conspiracy theories. Such foreign interference was a result, above all, of the Middle East's strategic importance and, subsequently, its resource wealth. Due to space limitation, this analysis is restricted to a detailed presentation of one particular decisive external intervention – the post-WW I settlement. It provides a demonstration of a region unable to determine its destiny, establishing a benchmark for comparisons with the situation today. This example was chosen because of its significant region-wide repercussions and its occurrence at a watershed moment in the Middle East's history – the Ottoman Empire's disintegration, the entity that had established the regional order for several centuries. This is comparable to the seismic changes triggered by the 2011 uprisings, which are already starting to redefine some of the fundamentals of the current Middle East order.

The reference to a Middle East order requires a few words about what constitutes the "Middle East." As Fawcett shows, there is a debate about this term. For some who opt for a wider view, the term covers all the members of the Arab League, the non-Arab countries of Israel, Turkey, and Iran as well as the Muslim Republics of Central Asia. Others, however, favor a narrow definition that limits the "Middle East" to the Arab states of West Asia and Egypt.[32] In this paper, the Middle East refers to the Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula, the Maghreb, the Mashreq and the Levant, plus the non-Arab countries of Israel, Iran, and Turkey. Although in different ways, the end of WW I affected all of them.

The Middle East post-WW I settlement consisted of agreeing on the status of the lands that were once part of the Ottoman Empire. In the end, American President Woodrow Wilson's vision of allowing self-determination did not materialize. Instead, the bulk of the territories fell under external rule either as colonies/

32. L. Fawcett, "Introduction: the Middle East and International Relations," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (2nd ed), edited by L. Fawcett. (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 3.

protectorates (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, or Egypt) or as mandates (Lebanon, Syria, or Iraq). After the end of WW I, only three Middle East countries were formally independent – today's Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran.[33] The post-WW I settlement has left a particularly bitter memory in the region because of the instances of British double-dealing and the contradictory secret negotiations and agreements. These are exemplified by the conflicting British pledges to Sharif Hussein and to the French and by the Balfour Declaration, announced on November 2, 1917. It pronounced the British government's formal support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.[34] Cleveland and Bunton emphasize that the correspondence between the British High Commissioner in Egypt Sir Henry McMahon and Sharif Hussein, which negotiated the terms of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, was ambiguous. Upon starting the revolt, Sharif Hussein was aware that there were outstanding territorial issues.[35]

Nevertheless, Cleveland and Bunton state that: "even if we took into account all the reservations and qualifications of McMahon's letters, Husayn had reason to believe that he was promised an independent Arab state … in Arabia, interior Syria, parts of Iraq and possibly Palestine."[36] The contradiction with the actual outcome post-WW I deepened the Arab perception that Britain had misled and betrayed the Arabs by not fulfilling its war-time pledge to them.[37]

Overall, the post-WW I settlement was crucial in reshaping the regional environment. It decided the territorial borders of the newly-established states in the Middle East. In the process, the foreign (Western) concept of the nation-state was promoted as this new order's organizing principle. Simultaneously, traditional identifications along religious, ethnic, and tribal lines were weakened – not only was the Arab nation split between many new states but these states' borders often cut across tribal lines. This worked towards the creation of complex and often contradictory new sources of interest and loyalty, fostering instability. Volatility was further engendered by the arbitrary nature of many of the new state borders, often drawn following the colonial rulers' interests. At times, they brought together

33. E. Rogan, "The Emergence of the Middle East into the Modern State System," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (2nd ed), edited by L. Fawcett (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 21-43 for more details.
34. Ibid., 26-7 succinctly overviews British pledges to its WW1 allies.
35. W.L. Cleveland and M. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (4th ed.) (Boulder: Westview, 2009), 157-61 for more details.
36. Ibid., 160.
37. Ibid.

divergent ethnic and/or religious groups to form a new state (i.e., Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq).[38] Another crucial source of instability was the commitment to create a Jewish national home in Palestine, which took a more determined shape post-WW II.

All these decisions, fundamental to the future of Arab nations and the Middle East region, were taken without any real input from the local population. Rather, they were reached through negotiations between the great powers (primarily, Britain and France). As Rogan states, the Arab delegates at the Versailles peace conference were in a weak bargaining position,[39] and they could not ensure that their views were taken into account during the negotiations or in the treaties signed. An elaboration of the main factors that created this situation demonstrates the Middle East's major problems in its efforts to assert itself on the international stage, thus highlighting the shortcomings in its foreign and security policy capabilities.

First and foremost, the Middle East, and more specifically the Arabs, did not possess a strong military force. This prevented them from attaining their goals through battles. The example of the Turks renegotiating their peace treaty after their War of Independence shows the significance of having the ability to render successful military resistance. Unlike this limited but decisive Turkish success, the Arabs failed to defend their territories. The French campaign for reasserting control over the territories of today's Syria led to a defeat of Faysal's army in July 1920 and to the consequent elimination of the independent Arab state.[40] Secondly, despite its prosperity in earlier periods, by the early 20th century, the Middle East's economic development was lagging significantly behind Western Europe. According to Maddison, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 1820 was 532 international Geary-Khamis dollars as opposed to the 1202 GDP per capita of Western Europe in the same period.[41] Thirdly, the Arab delegates in Versailles were thrown into dealing with the diplomats of the traditional great powers. Rogan describes this as a complex science, of which the Arab representatives had "little understanding and less experience."[42] All these

38. R. Hinnesbusch, "The Politics of Identity in Middle Eastern International Relations," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (2nd ed.), edited by L. Fawcett (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 148-69 for more details.

39. Rogan, "The Emergence of the Middle East into the Modern State System," 28.

40. Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East,* 167.

41. Cited in I. Drine, "In Time of Troubles: Challenges and Prospects in the MENA," William Davidson Institute Working Paper 981, 2010, http://wdi.umich.edu/files/publications/workingpapers/wp981.pdf. (accessed April 21, 2014), 4.

42. Rogan, "The Emergence of the Middle East into the Modern State System."

form part of or are related to some of the key elements of hard power as outlined by Morgenthau – military preparedness, industrial capacity, or the quality of diplomacy and government. So, concurring with Nye's argument, in the beginning of the 20th century, hard power formed the key determinants of an actor's foreign and security policy capabilities,[43] which accounts for the region's weakness.

These weaknesses were even more pronounced in the Gulf Arab area, a territory plagued by crucial structural problems that have, until recently, militated against its ability to accumulate power. The bulk of this land is desert, and the harsh climate has led to low population density. Its inhabitants struggled for their survival, living on sheep and camel breeding and very basic agriculture; often they were forced to migrate because of drought, famine, and starvation.[44] In turn, this meant that overall this territory was lagging behind even the rest of the Middle East in terms of economic development. For example, as late as 1956, the illiteracy levels in Saudi Arabia were staggering, estimated at about 95 percent.[45] Due to its inhospitable environment, foreign powers had limited interest in the peninsula's interior. The British aimed to maintain their control over the coastal areas,[46] vital for their maritime supremacy and trade routes, while the Ottomans focused on the two holy cities of Makkah and Medina. With the discovery of the Arab Gulf's huge energy reserves, things started to change. These strategically important natural resources have over time transformed the Gulf Arab societies, in the process also shifting the regional and international power balance.

This coincided with the gradual switch in the facets of power from hard to soft. In the early 21st century, despite persistent weaknesses in certain hard power capabilities (i.e., small populations or lack of strategic depth, Saudi Arabia being an exception), the Gulf Arab countries have become crucial regional players.[47] This has enabled them to exercise decisive influence in the Arab uprisings process. Despite some convergence of goals with the West, there are also differences. Thus, unlike

43. Nye Jr., "Soft Power," and *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* ch. 1.

44. A. Al-Rashed, "Why Israel Was not Established in Modern-day Saudi Arabia," *Al-Arabiya,* April 12, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/04/12/Why-Israel-was-not-established-in-modern-day-Saudi-Arabia.html (accessed April 21, 2014).

45. Lipsky, cited in S. Hertog, *Princes, Brokers and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 49.

46. A. Al-Rashed, "Why Israel Was not Established in Modern-day Saudi Arabia."

47. S. Hertog, "EU-GCC Relations in the Era of the Second Oil Boom," Bertelsmann Stiftung Working Paper, December 2007, http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2007/2007_hertog.pdf. (accessed May 4, 2014). The paper points to their increased economic leverage even prior to the beginning of the 2008 global recession.

the post-WW I situation, regional actors have a say in the transformative processes triggered by the 2011 uprisings.

## The Arab Uprisings' Outcomes – towards Greater Regional Independence

To analyze the specific regional contributions to shaping the outcomes of the 2011 uprisings, several issues must be addressed: the nature of the Arab uprisings; the comparison between Western and Arab Gulf countries' foreign and security preferences and policies vis-à-vis the uprisings; an elaboration of the capabilities that enable the attainment of the Arab Gulf countries' foreign and security policy goals even in the face of divergent Western preferences; the limitations of Gulf Arab countries' policies towards the uprisings.

### *Who Triggered the Arab Uprisings? Comparative Analysis of Western and Arab Gulf Countries' Foreign and Security Policies vis-à-vis the Uprisings*

The Arab uprisings started in Tunisia in December 2010 with the self-immolation of a street vendor.[48] The protest movement soon spread to other Arab countries. In this context, there have been wide variations in the course of events in different countries and in the outcomes to date.[49] Nevertheless, there are also commonalities, summed up by Ramadan as: "protests against social and economic conditions, rejection of dictatorship, the fight against corruption."[50] Given our concern with the changing balance of power between regional and outside players, two issues are analyzed more closely. Firstly, we examine the debate over whether the protest movements were designed and manipulated from abroad. Secondly, we make a comparison of the preferences and attainments of the US, EU, and Gulf Arab countries' foreign and security policy goals in the post-2011 Middle East. As explained later, each actor faces complex and oftentimes conflicting considerations and interests, which also leads to difficult relations between the actors. Thus, plurality is suggested as the key prism for analysis.

On the issue of external involvement in the uprisings, arguably some Western policies in the last few decades have been conducive to triggering the events, while

48. For a discussion about the proper label for the phenomenon that started in Tunisia and subsequently spread to other parts of the Middle East, see G. Achcar, *The People Want: a Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (London: Saqi Books, 2013), Introduction; or T. Ramadan, Islam and the Arab Awakening (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 7-8.

49. Achcar, *The People Want,* ch. 5 for more details.

50. Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening,* 7.

certain Western actors have played an enabling role. Achcar eloquently exposes the Western support for conservative and repressive regimes in the Middle East,[51] driven by ensuring access to oil. Nevertheless, an opposing trend in Western policies can also be detected, especially since the end of the Cold War, i.e., the policy of democracy promotion. This has been the cornerstone in the EU's external relations policy and became the Bush administration's flagship policy post-9/11. Western democracy promotion has been criticized on many grounds, such as inconsistency or as being a guise for the pursuit of economic or strategic interests.[52] Nevertheless, as Schimmelfennig has persuasively shown, with EU's Eastern Enlargement, rhetorical commitment to certain norms at times has decisive impact on the actors' foreign policies.[53] Furthermore, as Nye has argued convergence between words and deeds is crucial for an actor's soft power.[54] In the case of Western involvement in the Middle East, democracy promotion has manifested itself in the support for certain civil society organizations or in the considerable financial resources devoted to this aim.[55] Still, at present, Western actors are not overwhelmingly pressured to match closely their words of support for democracy in the Middle East with decisive actions. Instead, Western democracy promotion policies have affected the overall environment, making it conducive to the spread of certain ideas. As Nonneman puts it with reference to the Gulf, Western policies have put: "unquestionably a greater level of outside pressure both from specific actors and in the wider 'Zeitgeist' terms."[56]

Furthermore, the West has played an enabling role, for example by securing the funds for training Middle East activists and bloggers. The focus has been on how

51. Achcar, *The People Want,* ch. 3.

52. Ibid. For more details on the existing criticisms to EU democracy promotion, see, for example, the contributions in M. Pace and P. Seeberg (eds), *The European Union's Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 2010). O. Hassan, "America's Freedom Dilemma for the Middle East: Interests or Democracy?" in *Europe, the USA and Political Islam – Strategies for Engagement,* ed. M. Pace (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 161-91 exemplifies criticisms to US democracy promotion in the Middle East.

53. F. Schimmelfennig, "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union," *International Organisation* 55, no. 1 (2001): 47-80.

54. Nye Jr., "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," 100-1.

55. I. Ioannides and A. Missiroli, "Arab Springs and Transitions in the Southern Mediterranean: the EU and Civil Societies One Year On," Berlaymont Paper, January 2012, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2000173 (accessed February 2, 2015). This paper, for example, provides financial data and overview of EU's record in this area.

56. G. Nonneman, "Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies: From Liberalisation to Democratisation? A Comparative Perspective," Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper 6, 2006, http://dro.dur.ac.uk/472/1/NonnemanV3.pdf (accessed on February 2, 2015), 25.

to build non-violent movements using social media and Internet.[57] According to an Amnesty International representative, Western support for non-violent activism is ongoing in Syria.[58] Another aspect of the enabling role of the West is revealed by the *Guardian's* in-depth analysis of the "Anglo-American opposition creation business" in Syria, which delves into the uncritical acceptance of news on Syria by mainstream Western media.[59] The West's enabling role is important for creating conditions favorable to pro-democracy groups in the Middle East. In fact, some degree of coordination between the government and other actors in the pluralistic Western political systems is discernible in that some of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing training to Middle East activists were financed by the US government besides the support rendered by US-based digital giants such as Google, Twitter or Yahoo.[60] Western governments' role in the run up to the uprising is further revealed by the fact that training was extended to activists of only some Arab countries.[61]

In other important respects, however, the Arab uprisings were indigenous. Firstly, their timing was spontaneous; it was not directed or controlled from outside. Secondly, once it started, the process was also spontaneous and organic, and not externally conducted. In fact, as the discussion that follows shows, initial Western reaction was hesitant, indicating that it did not wish to see the events unfolding on the ground. Thirdly, the forces behind the uprisings were local, initially consisting mainly of urban middle class well-educated secularists.[62] Fourthly, it was the Arabs on the streets who through their non-violent protests and readiness to pay even the ultimate price showed a determination to change existing reality, which can come only from attaining a certain level of political maturity.[63] So, to use a metaphor, no amount of external influence would have led to the spark in December 2010 if the haystack was not already dry, which made it extremely susceptible to catching fire. A plurality of actors and interests were involved but, ultimately, Middle East players led

57. Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening,* 11.

58. H. Slater, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Syria," Public Lecture, University of Buckingham, Radcliff Centre, April 30, 2014.

59. C. Sckelton, "The Syrian Opposition: Who's Doing the Talking?" *The Guardian,* July 12, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/12/syrian-opposition-doing-the-talking/print (accessed May 3, 2014).

60. Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening,* 11-12.

61. Ibid., 41.

62. E. Jones, "Egypt: Seeds of Change," *Al Jazeera: People and Power,* February 9, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrNz0dZgqN8 (accessed May 4, 2014).

63. Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening,* ch. 1.

the actual events. This enhanced regional input in developments fundamental to the Middle East is strengthened further by the increased ability of regional actors, like the Gulf Arab countries, to play a central role in the management of the unfolding processes, alongside key external actors with high stakes in the region, like the West. In an attempt to sketch a tentative account of Western and Gulf Arab countries' input in the post-2011 Middle East processes, the paper briefly sums up the plurality of considerations, undertakings, and some of the outcomes up until early to mid-2014. These show areas of convergence and divergence between Western and Gulf responses, highlighting the specific contribution made by the Gulf Arab countries.

Three main considerations guide the Gulf Arab countries' responses to the 2011 uprisings: preventing the contagion of protest from reaching their shores; managing the processes in the Arab Spring countries according to their interests; and using the opportunities offered by the geostrategic shifts in the struggle for regional dominance. The US and the EU for their part had an inconsistent response due to conflicting pressures from norms and values on the one hand, and interests on the other. Hence, it took them a while to embrace the change in the Arab world and when they did, it was only half-heartedly. Gradually, they put in place long-term policies intended to support transition, such as the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, thus reiterating their commitment to democracy in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in places like Yemen and Bahrain, they maintained their old preference for stability, not exercising pressure for deeper reforms. Like the Gulf Arab countries, Western actors are involved in the regional geostrategic struggles (for example, the intervention in Libya or the Syrian civil war).[64]

These considerations prompt a plurality of cross-cutting and/or overlapping undertakings by the actors in response to the Arab uprisings. Western and Gulf Arab countries' interests concur on many issues such as maintaining stability in certain countries; they also have overlapping geostrategic calculations. However, there are also differences in the details. Arguably, an area that could see fundamental long-term divergence is that of preferred domestic partners in the Arab Spring countries. While the Gulf Arab countries may be predisposed to supporting different Islamist forces, as seen by the Saudi backing for the Noor party in Egypt in the early post-Mubarak days, ideally, the West would presumably like to deal with the secular forces closest to it ideologically. For example, the new American approach to the Arab world

64. T. Schumacher and Molina I. Fernandez, *"EU and GCC Countries' Foreign Policies and the Mediterranean Neighborhood – towards Synergetic Cooperation?"* GRC Gulf Papers, 2013, http://www.grc.net/data/contents/uploads/EU_and_GCC_Countries%E2%80%99_Foreign_Policies_and_the_Mediterranean_Neighborhood_1040.pdf (accessed May 4, 2014). This paper offers a good overview of the respective actors' policies on the Arab uprisings.

post-2011 is based on promoting substantive region-wide political and economic reforms and transition to democracy.[65] Nevertheless, in the post-2011 Middle East, following Western preference for dealing with elected counterparts, perceived as more stable and legitimate, support for Islamist governments has increased. This was the case in Tunisia and Egypt during the Presidency of Mohammad Morsi. In fact, at times the Western support for these governments exceeded that of some Gulf countries.[66] Actually, the Qatar-Saudi rift over support for the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrates the existence of crucial deep-seated Gulf Arab divergences over how to manage the 2011 uprisings. In March 2014, this led to an unprecedented recall of the Saudi, Bahraini, and Emirati Ambassadors to Doha,[67] having at least a temporary negative impact on the Gulf prospects for unity.[68]

Crucially, although in some instances the Gulf countries did not succeed in attaining their desired outcome (e.g., keeping President Mubarak in power), and in others the struggle is ongoing (e.g., the civil war in Syria), they played a decisive role in the Arab uprisings. Firstly, at times, in sharp contrast to the West, their positions on the unfolding events were more consistent and expedient. For example, in early 2011 Western actors proclaimed their support for the uprisings only after a highly embarrassing gaffe. In Tunisia, the French initially supported Ben Ali, going as far as their then Foreign Minister offering the help of French security services for putting

65. F. Gerges, "The Obama Approach to the Middle East: the End of America's Moment?" *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 311. It should be stressed, however, that this US approach is caught in the same dilemma as faced by the Europeans because these policies are not simultaneously promoting stability. As a result, there is an inconsistent approach, exemplified for example, by Obama's decision to renew military aid to Egypt. I am grateful to C. Koch for pointing this out.

66. C. Spencer and J. Kinnimont, "The Arab Spring: the Changing Dynamics of West-GCC Cooperation," in *The Uneasy Balance: Potential and Challenges to the West's Relations with the Gulf States,* ed. R. Alcaro and A. Dessi (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2013), http://www.iai.it/pdf/Quaderni/iairp_08.pdf (accessed May 4, 2014), 57 and 49, respectively.

67. B. Darwish, "Unity is the Only Answer," *Kuwait Times,* March 6, 2014, http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=opinions&id=688953&lim=0&lang=en&tblpost=2014_03 (accessed March 8, 2014).

68. K. Al-Sayed, "Why did GCC States Pull Their Envoys?" *The Peninsula,* March 9, 2014, http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=opinions&id=689366&lim=45&lang=en&tblpost=2014_03 (accessed March 12, 2014). Following an announcement in November 2014 that the three countries will return their Ambassadors to Doha, it seems this dispute has been resolved. S. Kerr, "Gulf States Send Envoys Back to Qatar," *Financial Times,* November 17, 2014, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fb05377c-6e15-11e4-bffb-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Qbiofu1y (accessed February 2, 2015) provides more details about this declaration.

the unrest down.[69] French indecisiveness inevitably led to slow and inconsistent EU-level policy on the uprisings.

Similarly, the Obama administration was divided over how to react to the Egyptian protests[70] obstructing a decisive American input into the outcome. On the contrary, leading Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia had clear positions, evident, for example, in their determined backing of Mubarak due to security considerations. Similarly, in the first three years of the war in Syria, Gulf Arab countries have been highly visible in supporting the Syrian rebels by providing military equipment and training, while the West has been much more selective.[71] Having a clear position in fast-moving volatile situations can make all the difference as it enables the actor to interpret the unfolding events and to act accordingly in order to achieve its preferences. Gulf Arab countries' policies have become proactive since 2011,[72] a clear sign of their increased abilities to manage their environment.

The actor with the clear position is well placed to significantly influence the outcome in an event. For example, during the July 2013 events in Egypt, Saudi, Emirati and Kuwaiti determined and substantial financial support,[73] parts of which crucially took only a few weeks to materialize,[74] changed the political and financial realities in Egypt, contributing to the acceptance of the power transfer. By the time the US suspended part of its military aid to Cairo in October 2013,[75] the moment for this action to have a profound resonance by endangering the military's hold on power in Egypt had gone.

69. K. Willsher, "French Foreign Minister Resigns," *The Guardian,* February 27, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/27/french-foreign-minister-resigns (accessed May 4, 2014).
70. H. Cooper, et al., "In US Signals to Egypt, Obama Straddled a Rift," *New York Times,* February 12, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/world/middleeast/13diplomacy.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed May 4, 2014).
71. Slater, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Syria."
72. Cf. A. Sager, "Challenging Times for Saudi Foreign Policy," *Arab News,* January 23, 2014, http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=opinions&id=682150&lim=15&lang=en&tblpost=2014_01 (accessed January 25, 2014).
73. N.a., "Egypt Wins $8 bn Saudi and UAE Aid, Names MP," *Arab News,* July 10, 2013, http://gitm.kcorp.net/index.php?id=656218&news_type=Top&lang=en (accessed July 13, 2013).
74. N.a., "Egypt Receives $2bn from Riyadh," *The Peninsula,* July 22, 2013, http://gitm.kcorp.net/index.php?id=657639&news_type=Top&lang=en (accessed July 25, 2013).
75. S. Ackerman and I. Black, "US Trims Aid to Egypt as Part of Diplomatic 'Recalibration'," *The Guardian,* October 9, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/09/obama-cuts-military-aid-egypt (accessed May 26, 2014).

Secondly, Gulf Arab countries pursuing their own foreign and security policy goals have been a critical partner for the West in ensuring certain outcomes, such as the Yemeni transition deal[76] or the Libyan military mission. According to Khatib, Qatar pushed the Libyan intervention "not only through formal diplomatic channels but also by means of public diplomacy through the Al Jazeera network."[77] The March 2011 events in Bahrain can also be read in this context. According to Spencer and Kinnimont, there is ambiguity over whether the West supported the Peninsula Shield troops' entry. Some maintain that the US was presented with a fait accompli, while others say it opposed the troops' entry. Nevertheless, the two analysts doubt whether the US had legal and political grounds to oppose the move.[78] This action, however, took Bahrain off the spotlight by ending the mass-scale protests (small-scale protests are ongoing). This development concurs with the Western preference for stability in some Arab Spring countries. Therefore, the dispatch of the Peninsula Shield forces to Bahrain can be seen as an important Gulf Arab contribution to managing the uprisings, while simultaneously promoting outcomes concurrent with Western preferences. Overall, the Gulf Arab countries have not only been a crucial partner for the actors with stakes in the Arab uprisings but have also contributed in managing the process. So, which major foreign and security policy capabilities allowed this? Also, are there any important limitations to be considered?

### *The Exercise of Power – Gulf Arab Countries' Foreign and Security Policy Capabilities and their Current Limitations*

The key factors enabling an actor's exercise of soft power were summed up as: attractive personality; its culture, political values, and institutions; and policies perceived as legitimate. Furthermore, according to Nye, soft power's deployment is facilitated through undertakings such as the establishment of offices providing information about the actor and its culture; foreign language radio/TV broadcasting; enabling multiple entities' interaction with foreign organizations, thus establishing a channel for presenting governmental and private views; credibility; convergence

76. G. Hill and G. Nonneman, "Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy," Chatham House Briefing Paper, May 1, 2011, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/0511yemen_gulfbp.pdf (accessed February 2, 2015); E. Burke, "EU-GCC Cooperation: Securing the Transition in Yemen," GRC Gulf Paper, 2013, http://eu-gcc.kcorp.net/common/publicationfile/28.pdf (accessed May 4, 2014).

77. L. Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy: the Limits of Pragmatism," *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 420-1.

78. C. Spencer and J. Kinnimont, "The Arab Spring: the Changing Dynamics of West-GCC Cooperation."

between words and policies. For the Gulf Arab countries, a crucial hard power facet – abundant financial resources after a decade-long spike in energy prices – facilitate the active implementation of many of these soft power facets in the post-2011 Middle East.

Firstly, today there are powerful Gulf Arab media outlets, most prominently exemplified by Al Jazeera which has been broadcasting in English since 2006 and has gained a foothold in the US since 2013, thus giving a platform for the expression of Arab/Qatari viewpoints. According to Ramadan, "Al-Jazeera has been one of the prime movers of the Arab awakening."[79] The validity of this point is reinforced by the prominent place given to the network's coverage in the settlement of the GCC rift in the spring of 2014. Furthermore, former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton reportedly praised the network's coverage, saying it provides "real news."[80] The outcome can be seen in the increased prominence of Middle Eastern viewpoints on the Arab uprisings, facilitating acceptance of certain ideas and undertakings.

Secondly, the Gulf countries have provided crucial help to various factions in the Arab Spring countries' domestic political arenas. The significant support for the post-July 2013 Egyptian government has been already mentioned. Other examples are the Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood or the Saudi support for *salafi* political groups, with over $80 million invested by Middle Eastern *salafi* organizations before the 2011 Egyptian election alone, according to a RAND report.[81] The successful exercise of this particular power facet is reinforced by other factors mentioned previously. For example, Saudi Arabia's special place in the Muslim world, as the site of the two holy mosques, conveys Islamic legitimacy and credibility to the political groups it promotes.

Thirdly, Gulf Arab countries' familiarity with the culture, political values, and institutions of the other countries in the Middle East has also been central. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members', especially Saudi Arabia's, ties with and influence over Yemeni tribes were pivotal in securing its transition.[82] Furthermore, such familiarity facilitates Gulf business endeavors in the region, including in problematic countries often neglected by international investors.[83] This is not a minor

79. Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening*, 48.
80. Cited in Ibid.
81. Cited in Ibid., 209.
82. Burke, "EU-GCC Cooperation: Securing the Transition in Yemen," for more details.
83. Ibid; the general point is made by S. Hertog, "EU-GCC Relations in the Era of the Second Oil Boom." Bertelsmann Stiftung Working Paper, December 2007, http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2007/2007_hertog.pdf (accessed May 4, 2014), p. 10.

point given the economic grievances underlying the uprisings. This economic facet also enables interactions with private and governmental entities, further reinforcing the Gulf Arab countries' soft power in the Middle East. Fourthly, since the first oil boom Gulf Arab countries have founded and financed multiple aid and development agencies across the Arab and the Muslim world, often using them to support vulnerable countries like Yemen.[84]

The West's multifaceted constraints on exercising power in the post-2011 Middle East further facilitated the Gulf Arab countries' post-2011 successful deployment of hard and soft power. Firstly, despite considerable experience in promoting democracy elsewhere, in the Arab Spring countries, the West was unsuccessful in supporting secularist forces to election victories. Partly, this is due to the contradictory Western policies in the Middle East, which have made seemingly Westward-looking actors unpopular.[85] Secondly, a number of other recent developments severely curtailed Western power in the region. The legacy of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has made Western publics unwilling to commit resources to military undertakings, which has restricted the options available in cases like Syria or Libya. Furthermore, the revelation of the Iraq war's false premises undermined trust in Western accounts. Also, the 2008 financial crisis severely affected Western economic and financial strength. The eurozone crisis pressed the EU to look inwards, while the West more generally has much less economic resources to devote to its external policies. In fact, during the financial crisis, the West relied on Gulf Arab support for ensuring its financial institutions' liquidity.[86] The new political, military, and economic realities have geostrategic repercussions in the Middle East, especially in the unsettled post-2011 situation. They not only created the space for regional actors to step in but also prompted them to do so to safeguard their political and security interests.[87]

Despite their considerably increased capabilities and important input into the processes triggered by the Arab uprisings, the Gulf countries face important limitations. Their long-term ability to maintain current gains depends on the successful articulation of an attractive alternative model for Middle East development, one which enables economic prosperity and advances an indigenous socio-political

84. Ibid; the general point is made by S. Hertog, "EU-GCC Relations in the Era of the Second Oil Boom." Bertelsmann Stiftung

85. As suggested by the discussion in Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics,* 29.

86. Cf. K. Coates-Ulrichsen, "The Gulf Goes Global: The Evolving Role of Gulf Countries in the Middle East and North Africa and Beyond," FRIDE Working Paper 121, 2013, http://www.fride.org/descarga/WP_121_The_Gulf_Goes_Global.pdf (accessed on May 5, 2014), 7.

87. Sager, "Challenging Times for Saudi Foreign Policy."

blueprint.[88] The Gulf economies' current reliance on energy rents does not enable them to provide a model for economic prosperity in the Arab Spring countries. As already mentioned, their considerable religious clout enables them to articulate an indigenous socio-political blueprint. However, instances of significant popular backlash against Qatari policies in Libya or Egypt[89] demonstrate the lack of wide acceptance of some of the solutions promoted by the Gulf Arab countries. This is a very serious matter. It demonstrates a power weakness that can lead to regional rifts long-term if left unchecked, thus potentially prompting regional belligerence rather than cooperation, in the process diminishing the Gulf Arab countries' soft power.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the changing structural realities in the Middle East and the relative importance of some of the key players in the region in the context of the Arab uprisings. It looked at the main facets of power determining a player's foreign and security policy capabilities. Building on the existing political analysis debates, it adopted a conceptualization of power that is agency-centered. Nevertheless, it proposed a novel perspective for the analysis, one that focuses on those who have previously been the recipients of the power exercise, thus concentrating on the experiences of Middle East actors, like the Gulf Arab countries.

The major finding is that unlike the regional capabilities post-WW I, today the Middle East is much more independent, which can contribute to restoring the regional sense of agency. Building on a detailed elaboration of the various facets of power, the discussion showed how they were deployed by Western and Middle Eastern actors during the post-WW I settlement and in the management of the processes triggered by the 2011 Arab uprisings. While in the early 20th century the Middle East was not able to determine its destiny, today local actors have played a key role in the emerging new regional order. Local people led the protest movements, organizing and participating in millions in the efforts to overthrow the existing order. Furthermore, indigenous players like the Gulf Arab countries have contributed in crucial ways in influencing the specific outcomes on the ground. Given the complex and fluid processes involved, the actors' interests and considerations are multiple, which leads to cross-cutting as well as concurring policies. The central issue which will determine the eventual outcome is which local forces will manage to attract popular support. On this, both Western actors and the Gulf Arab countries face

88. This point is based on issues discussed in Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening*.

89. A. Hammond, "Qatar's Leadership Transition: Like Father, Like Son," *ECFR Policy Brief*, 2014, http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR95_QATAR_BRIEF_AW.pdf (accessed May 5, 2014), 1.

important limitations, though the latter currently have some important hard and soft power advantages. However, the foreign and security policies of the regional actors, including the Gulf Arab countries, must be focused on addressing their current shortcomings. This will enable them to build on available opportunities so that present strengths are maximized and Middle East independence is preserved and further strengthened.

## About the Author

**Dr. Valentina Kostadinova** is a Lecturer in Politics at the University of Buckingham, UK. She completed her undergraduate degree in International Relations in Sofia, Bulgaria (2001) and attained her Master's in European Studies at the University of Exeter, UK (2003). Her Ph.D. thesis, completed in 2010, critically examines the contribution of the European Commission to the construction and reconstruction of borders in the EU through four policy areas – the European Neighbourhood Policy, social policy, border controls, and free movement of people. She is currently working on a manuscript based on this research, due to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. Valentina has taught Undergraduate and Postgraduate modules on politics and the EU at the School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham and the University of Buckingham. She was also an Honorary Research Associate on a successful ESRC-funded project, "Paradoxes and Contradictions in EU Democracy Promotion Efforts in the Middle East." Her research interests include (re)construction of EU borders, the European Commission, EU's external relations with the Middle Eastern countries (especially with the GCC and Saudi Arabia), and EU and regionalism in the Arab Gulf. She has published in leading academic journals and edited volumes. She is a member of UACES and an Associate of the Higher Education Academy.



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