

The Middle East to Gulf time

International conference organized by GREMMO (CNRS, University Lyon 2 and Lyon Institute of Political Studies) and by the Grenoble Institute of Political Studies; November 3 and 4, 2014.

Grand Amphithéâtre, University Lyon 2, Quai Claude Bernard, 69007 Lyon, France.

The domestic reasons for the uprisings that occurred in Arab countries were widely analyzed these past three years. By now, it is important to consider new dimensions and to inquire about the regional roots for these conflicts, taking into account regional and international geopolitics. In a context of weakening American hegemony in the region, but keeping in mind a possible redeployment of their power in case Iran is reinserted in the international scene, several Gulf countries deployed a strong diplomatic activism towards different actors, using singular diplomatic and financial resources, first Qatar, and later Saudi Arabia, when the country reassess their control over the situation in the region in 2013. This activism seems to have put the Middle East in a real context of a 'new Cold War', harboring an indirect conflict with Iran, which Syria is the main battlefield, because the conflict that started on spring 2011 quickly became regionalized and internationalized.

Development policies and economic dirigisme that characterized Middle Eastern countries, with exception of Lebanon, were interrupted during the 1980's and these countries firmly engaged themselves down the liberal road (MEDA program, free-trade area with the European-Union, Great Arab Free Trade Agreement). From 2002, with the rise of oil prices, Gulf countries became the main provider of Foreign Direct Investment in the Middle East. Their dynamic domestic economy attracted rising migration fluxes, particularly from the Near East. Through migrant transfers, these migration fluxes clearly reinforced the financial dependence of countries providing workforce on the Gulf's petro monarchies

The international economic crisis and its repercussions in the Gulf have, however, forced the petro monarchies to reduce their investments in Arab countries, meanwhile an important part of migrants where faced with unemployment and forced to go back to their countries. Can we consider that this factor significantly contributed to the 'Arab Spring', and that this is the circumstantial effect that triggered a structural crisis?

Gulf countries don't export only their resources, but also their economic, cultural, religious and political model. Their satellite TV channels, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, are powerful instruments to broadcast their influence, as we witnessed during the Arab Springs, with every TV channel conveying the ideology of its supporting regime. Qatar promotes and stage-manages the Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile Saudi Arabia support Salafi groups against the Muslim Brotherhood, backing up conservative regimes and fighting regimes supporting Iran. Competition between those two geopolitical actors is evident in destabilized countries: in Egypt, Riyadh strongly supports the military that ousted president Morsi and persecute the Muslim Brotherhood, much to the discontent of Doha; in Syria, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are financing hard-line rebel groups that antagonize each other, and they are competing to gain control over the National Coalition. These diverging choices created, by spring 2014, deep tensions within the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The energy overturning in the region seems to have deeply impacted the actual conflicts. The discovery of hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean basin brings up a new challenge: at the same time for domestic actors, fighting over the delimitation of international waters and over economic exploitation zones (Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey); and for international actors willing to control the exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbons in order to answer to their own interests (Gulf countries, Russia, Turkey, United States, Western Europe). In the long run, can these resources become a factor allowing the Near East to be independent from Gulf countries ? Right now, it is necessary to analyze the strategy of Middle Eastern countries faced with these energetic perspectives.

This conference, therefore, aims to consider the rapports existing between Arab countries from the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine), but also Turkey and the Gulf powers (Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council and even Iraq), through economic, political, confessional and cultural aspects. Secondly, it is necessary to speculate about the consequences of this influence on the actual transformations and contemporary crisis taking place in Western Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon).

Program:

Monday, November 3, 2014.

9:00 AM

Reception of participants.

10:00 AM

Opening

10:30-12:30 AM

Session 1: What are the Gulf countries (Iran and GCC) strategies towards Middle East and how they implement it?

Gulf countries are not only concerned by Arab countries, but by the entire world: this is clear for the GCC countries, but perhaps less to Iran. Both models diverge, since Iran doesn't undertake the same economic inclusion strategy in the global market as GCC countries, mainly because of geopolitical pressures. The two geopolitical clusters in the region are therefore competing, with Turkey as an outsider, with a Middle Eastern policy that was damaged by the 'Arab Springs'. The aim of this session is to understand the regional reasoning behind Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the context of their global geopolitics and the concurrence they are faced with by other regional and international actors.

2h00 – 4h00 PM,

Session 2 : The paradigms of revolts in the Middle East.

The destabilization of countries in the Middle East has several domestic and international causes. Evidently, we cannot put aside the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but this subject being abundantly studied, it is necessary to think about the goals and action models of Iran and GCC countries in the Arab Middle East. What do these countries have in common, and what is specific to each one of them? What are the paradigms of the revolts? There are several different explanations. The term civil war, when it comes to Syria, is not accepted by all researchers, less yet the sectarianism. But this is indeed what we are interested in and what will allow us to further understand this crisis, through opening a discussion among researchers concerning the causes of the crisis, the aspects that connect it to other movements in the Arab world and those that make it unique. We can identify three explanatory paradigms, more often than not opposites:

- The failure of a development trajectory and the questioning of the State practices.
- The coming back or the permanence of sectarianism
- The particular place of the region in international geopolitics.

4h30-6h30 PM

Session 3: New energy perspectives and new potential reorganizations of the oil rent.

What are the energy perspectives in the Middle East? Will some countries be able to pass from indirect rent to direct rent thanks to the Eastern Mediterranean fields? What will be the impact on the relation between the Gulf and the Middle East? Can the Jordanian shale gas free the country from dependency? What is the future of hydrocarbon fields in the Gulf?

Can the discovery of oil and gas fields in the Mediterranean call into question the energy dependence from Near East to Gulf countries? Could this help to create new relations based on cooperation towards the valorization of these resources, or will it awake competitiveness? Can the research for new energies (nuclear, renewable but also non-conventional hydrocarbons, like in Jordan) have identical effects?

Tuesday, November 4, 2014.

9h00-10h45 AM

Session 4: The Syrian crisis, is there space for democracy? Is democracy nowadays a pertinent goal to the region?

The Syrian spring brought up immeasurable hopes of democratization that proven to be contrary to the chaotic conflict ruling over the country at present - and with the possible victory of Bachar al-

Assad regime. The confessional minorities are afraid of a democratization that would mean the dictatorship of the majority and their consequent exclusion from the country. How can they be reassured nowadays, when hard-line Islamists conquered the revolution? The Syrian case rise questions about the ways and means of democratic transition in the fragmented societies of the Middle East.

11h15 AM- 01H00 PM

Session 5: Egypt, rapports between society, the state institutions and the army.

The Prophet and the Pharaoh (Kepel, 1984) is nowadays a pertinent book? After three years of tensions and reorganizations, what is the situation of the rapports between the state, the army and the society? How is the Egyptian society evolving? Can we measure the impact of millions of Egyptian emigrants in the Gulf countries on the social mutations and political engagement in Egypt? What is the present balance of powers between pro-western globalized groups and the Muslim Brotherhood? Throughout the new President of the Republic, which place the army intend to undertake in the political and social functioning of the country?

2h30-4h30 PM

Session 6: Possible scenarios to the Middle East?

This last session will consist in the synthesis of the conference. It will try to evaluate the possible outcomes for the Middle East. Its place in the new division of labor: if the Gulf countries are rich, nonetheless they are unproductive and their Rentier model paralyzes the productive activities in the entire region. After the Saudi reaction in Egypt and the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, what is left of the political transitions started in 2011-2012? Can Egypt reform itself? Can Lebanon continue to integrate itself in a scrounging manner in the global system? Will Syria and Iraq be able to maintain their territorial unity? What kind of future awaits political Islam through its different versions within Sunnis (Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi), but also within Shias? Will the confessionalization of debates and political conflicts last in the Gulf and in the Levant? Finally, almost four years after the beginning of the 'Arab Springs', under which scenarios can the balance of powers between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey be re-evaluated?

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