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THE FUTURE OF GGC DEFENSE WITH NATO OR AS ARAB NATO?

Abstract:

The Gulf represents a sub-region of the greater Middle Eastern regional system with its own security and political practices and challenges. Within the Gulf Cooperation Council established in 1981, there exists general agreement on the types of current challenges that need to be confronted but there has never been clear consensus as to the type of strategies and policy tools that could be applied to begin to tackle them. Recent crises on the doorsteps of the Gulf region (Yemen, Syria) however pushed the GCC to be more aggressive in its response by sending financial aid or getting involved militarily. The region does need a security structure but needs to decide which route to follow.

The first option is the European Union Security and Defense Policy as a model. The EU advanced its foreign policy agenda using its soft power and thrived at spreading prerogatives and expertise in areas such as conflict management and peace-building while slowly integrating its defence capabilities. The second option is within the framework of NATO since the US has had a military presence in the region and has had close relationships with member states. In terms of US security strategy, the stability of the Gulf is a critical just like Europe. NATO and four of the GCC members (The UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar) already members of the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative, which started in 2004 (Saudi Arabia and Oman have been invited but have not agreed yet.) The framework provides the members advice on defense transformation, defense budgeting, defense planning and civil-military relations, military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance. The third option would be its own structure including states beyond the GCC such as Egypt and Jordan: that is the idea of an Arab NATO or The Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) conceived to meet U.S. needs—to target Iran and to reduce U.S. regional presence without allowing China or Russia to gain influence—while disregarding the priorities, and constraints of prospective Arab member states. In reality, GCC buy weapons from Europe, China, Russia. China just established a military base in Djibouti.

So the question is what should the GCC security architecture look like? ESDP and NATO had both a common purpose. The purpose of an Arab security structure is not so clear. For example, not all Arab states make Iran as a priority issue. The structure should promote the members interest and not just a major one and external powers. MESA is criticized for serving mainly US and Saudi interests. Another issue is whether to start an alliance or to improve an existing structure: the GCC already has interoperability in place and NATO has created the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

The paper will look into those three options for the GCC: improving the exiting GCC framework for security, strengthening the relationship with NATO or creating a body including non GCC members.

Keywords:

GCC, NATO, CSDP, defense integration