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**International and domestic
conditions as drivers
of regional Integration.
Threats as factors for the
development of the Gulf
Cooperation Council (GCC)
during its emergence and in the
Arab Spring**

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**International and Domestic Conditions as drivers of
Regional Integration**

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*Threats as factors for the development of the Gulf Cooperation
Council (GCC) during its emergence and in the Arab Spring*

Bachelorarbeit für den BA- Studiengang Politikwissenschaft an der LMU München

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Abstract

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a coalition of the six Arab monarchies of the Gulf region, is by far the most developed regional integration organization of the Middle East. This Bachelor thesis tries to find reasons behind its emergence and its further development. In order to do so, a theory-based empirical approach is used, drawing from neorealist theories about alliance formation and the effects of domestic threats on regional integration. Two case studies - the emergence of the GCC and its behavior during the Arab Spring - are examined. The main finding from these theories and the case studies is that international and domestic threats played a major role in the development of the GCC and convinced Gulf leaders to embark upon a course directed towards closer cooperation with each other in order to strengthen their security in an unstable environment.

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1. Introduction

On December 19, 2011 the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, officially opened the 32nd meeting of the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh. In his opening address, after mentioning the numerous challenges facing the Gulf¹ monarchies, he called upon the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, “not to stop and watch the status quo as whoever follows such a behavior will find himself in the end of the queue facing loss and weakness. We all don't accept this situation for our nations, peoples, stability and security.”² He therefore asked the member states of the GCC “to go beyond the stage of cooperation to the stage of union in one entity that achieves the good and wards off evil”.³

This public commitment by a leading monarch of an Arab gulf state to the long-term goal of a unification of the GCC states into one single political entity triggered a heated debate among the Gulf States. The mere existence of this proposal and the ensuing discussions show just how far the six Arab monarchies of the Gulf, namely the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman, the Emirate of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have gone in their attempts to strengthen their coordination and to increase their cooperation with each other within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Seen in the light of the political situation of the Gulf roughly 40 years ago, in 1971, directly after the former Trucial States gained their independence from Great Britain, this high degree of cooperation seems to have been highly unlikely. Although 7 out of the 9 former Trucial emirates within a year united to form the United Arab Emirates, the problems and shortcomings associated with the constituting negotiations can already be seen as a microcosm of the numerous obstacles lying in the way of cooperation among Gulf states, ranging from external forces, historical rivalries and territorial disputes⁴ to fears of economic dominance due to an unequal distribution of resources and a general mistrust between states

¹ In order to avoid disputed and politically loaded terms such as “Persian Gulf” or “Arab Gulf”, I will use the more neutral term “Gulf” without addendum in this thesis. For the political use of the term “Arab Gulf” see Bosworth, C. Edmund, *The Nomenclature of the Persian Gulf*, in: *Iranian Studies* 30, no. 1/2 (1997), pp.77-94, p.94.

² Al Arabiya News, King Abdullah’s vision for road to the union, 24 December 2012, available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/24/256902.html> [accessed 30.12.2012].

³ Ibid.

⁴ For an overview of the territorial disputes and the often bitter-fought struggles resulting from them see Ohkrulik, Gwenn and Conge, Patrick J., *The Politics of Border disputes. On the Arabian Peninsula*, in: *International Journal* 54, no. 2 (1999), pp. 230-248.

of the region.⁵ Nevertheless, only one decade later, on May 25, 1981 the leaders of the six aforementioned states, building on various forms of cooperation in the antecedent years, gathered in Abu Dhabi and formally signed the founding charter of the GCC. Since then, over the last three decades, the level of integration between the GCC members has significantly increased in various fields from economy to security. Furthermore, the GCC states have also sharpened their common foreign policy profile and increasingly coordinate their diplomatic efforts. Today the GCC is by far the most successful and most advanced regional organization in the Arab world and the Middle East.

But how has this development been possible and how can it be accounted for? What were the driving factors that convinced the monarchs of the GCC states, who are usually very keen to protect their national sovereignty, to participate in such a project? And are the same mechanisms and motivations that caused the formation of the GCC still valid today? Given the tremendous geopolitical and economic importance of the Gulf region and the many ways the level of cooperation between GCC members influences events in the Gulf, the significance of these questions becomes obvious.

Therefore this thesis will take a closer look at them and will attempt to offer a contribution to the ongoing scientific debate about them. After a brief overview of the main scientific approaches to the emergence of the GCC and about the organization itself, a theory-based empirical approach to the topic will be followed. Therefore the second part of this text will address the theoretical approaches to the topic, in which, for various reasons to be outlined below, a focus on neorealist thinking will be placed. The main assumption drawn from this background is that mainly international and domestic threats provided the background and the motivation for the GCC states to embark upon a course directed towards closer ties with each other. In order to test this assumption the third and last part of this thesis will try to examine its validity on the background of two case studies during the history of the GCC, the first one being an examination of the years that led to the foundation of the organization and its immediate aftermath, the second one being the more actual context of the Arab Spring protests. The aim will be to assess the main motivations, motives and mechanisms that contributed to the collaboration of the Gulf states during these time periods.

⁵ For the role of these factors in the formation of the UAE see Legrenzi, Matteo, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf. Diplomacy, Security and Economic Cooperation in a Changing Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London et al., 2011, pp.11-20.

2. Literature Review

An overview of the relevant literature and a short presentation of several important points of view on the matter in the scientific debate is necessary since this work will mainly be based on an analysis of secondary literature on the subject,

While several approaches try to account for the emergence of the GCC,⁶ two of them are especially widespread and important for the scientific debate.⁷ One tries to explain the emergence of the GCC as the “natural”⁸ result of the inherent cultural, social, religious and political proximity of the participating states.⁹ The main arguments of this substantial group of scholars, which dominated scientific debates in the early years of the GCC, have been summarized by Emile A. Nakleh.¹⁰ Recent social constructivist approaches to the GCC share some aspects with this point of view, but have rejected the notion of a “natural” development of the coalition and instead have put greater emphasis on the notion of the *construction* of a common identity between the Gulf states as a factor for the development of the GCC.¹¹

The other strand of argumentation, which this thesis will try to bolster with empirical evidence, finds its basis in neorealist theories. Neorealist authors emphasize the significance of the numerous security threats in the dangerous environment of the Gulf region for an explanation of the emergence of the GCC.¹² While these classical neorealist approaches certainly have their merits, the problematic neorealist view of states as *black boxes*, has caused several of these authors to broaden their viewpoint and to include various other factors, which do not conform to traditional neorealism. This has mainly happened through the inclusion of domestic factors as drivers for the development of the GCC.¹³ Special attention will be paid to these works, mainly for the second part of this thesis regarding the role of domestic threats.

⁶ For some of these approaches see Lawson, Fred H., *Theories of Integration in a New Context. The Gulf Cooperation Council*, in: Thomas, Kenneth P. And Tétreault, Mary Ann (ed.), *Racing to Regionalize. Democracy, Capitalism and Regional Political Economy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London et al., 1999.

⁷ For a brief overview of the two approaches presented here see Holthaus, Leonie, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation im Golf-Kooperationsrat (Gulf Cooperation Council)*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2010, pp.32-42.

⁸ Nakleh, Emile A., *The Gulf Cooperation Council. Policies, Problems and Prospects*, Praeger Publishers, New York et al., 1986, p.XVI

⁹ Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, p.32.

¹⁰ Nakleh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.XVI.

¹¹ Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, pp.41-42.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.32.

¹³ Examples can be found for instance in Walt, Stephen M., *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca et al., 1987, who includes concerns about legitimacy as an important factor and in Cooper, Scott and Taylor, Brock, *Power and Regionalism. Explaining Regional Cooperation in the Persian Gulf*, in: Laursen, Finn (ed.), *Comparative Regional Integration. Theoretical Perspectives*, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington et al., 2003, who emphasize the role of domestic threats as factors for regional integration.

3. The Gulf Cooperation Council

Considerations about the nature of the Gulf Cooperation Council are indispensable for any analysis of its development. What exactly is this organization? The descriptions and assessments vary widely depending on the point of view, the time period and the situation, reaching from a mere “council of rulers”¹⁴ to a comprehensive regional integration organization, whose “establishment [...] heralded a shift in the organization of the international politics of the Gulf”,¹⁵ and from “first and foremost a security arrangement”¹⁶ to an organization whose focus lies in the economic sector.¹⁷ As this spectrum of opinions shows, there is a certain degree of dissent about the nature of the GCC, and some sort of clarification and positioning on these issues is necessary for this work.

To get a clearer view on the institutional structure of the organization, the fields of cooperation among them and generally the nature of the GCC will therefore be the purpose of this mostly descriptive chapter in order to acquire the necessary background for further analysis.

3.1 The Member States

The six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, covering the entire southern shore of the Gulf from Kuwait City to the Strait of Hormuz share several quite specific characteristics. The Gulf is one of the few regions of the world where monarchies still form the dominant political system, and the six local Arab monarchies form the GCC. The respective ruling dynasties all follow a conservative form of Sunni Islam,¹⁸ but in some cases preside over sizeable Shi’a minorities.¹⁹ According to estimations 46 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves are in the possession of the GCC states.²⁰ The enormous wealth gained from these

¹⁴ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.2.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp.2-3.

¹⁶ Nakleh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.50.

¹⁷ Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, p.60.

¹⁸ The exception forms Oman, where the ruler and the majority of the Population follows the Ibadi denomination of Islam, O’Reilly, Marc J., *Omanbalancing. Oman Confronts an Uncertain Future*, in: *Middle East Journal* 52, no.1 (1998), pp.70-84, p.72.

¹⁹ Ramazani, R.K., *The Gulf Cooperation Council. Record and Analysis*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1988, p.200. Although estimates vary, and Ramazani puts the number of Shi’ites in Bahrain at merely 49%, most sources suggest Shi’ites actually form the majority of the population in Bahrain. Sometimes the figures are put as high as 75%, Nasr, Vali, *When the Shi’ites Rise*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 85, no. 4 (2006), pp. 58-75, p.65. Cooper and Taylor suggest that Shi’a minorities are especially important, since they form a larger percentage of the citizen populations of the GCC countries and that they are often situated in strategically relevant geographical locations, Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, pp. 113-114.

²⁰ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.69.

resources, resulting in the establishment of rentier states,²¹ in combination with the skillful policy of the local monarchies, has led to the development of a unique political environment, that allowed the traditional ruling dynasties to keep the reins of power firmly in their hand, despite the economical and geopolitical dynamism of the region.²² Michael Herb characterizes Saudi Arabia and the UAE as absolute monarchies, while Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman are described as constitutional monarchies.²³ Despite this difference, their political systems are still - to different degrees - characterized by an autocratic political system²⁴ and the control of the most important decision-making positions of the state by members of the ruling family.²⁵

This is also true for the foreign policy establishment of these states, as all of the six heads of government and all of the six foreign ministers of the GCC states, as of December 2012, are members of the respective royal families,²⁶ and most foreign policy decisions are therefore taken under the direct influence of the monarchs and the royal family, with few actors and probably few diverging opinions and discussions involved.²⁷ This close interaction explains, why the preservation of the monarchical system in the face of international and domestic threats forms the primary principle of the foreign policies of these states.²⁸

²¹ For a recent description of rentier states and rentier mechanisms in the context of the GCC states see Hertog, Steffen, *The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems. Societies of Intermediaries*, in: *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 52, no. 2 (2010), pp.282-318.

²² For an overview of the various arguments on this matter, see Frisch, Hillel, *Why monarchies persist. balancing between internal and external vulnerabilities*, in: *Review of International Studies* 37, no.1 (2011), pp.167-184, pp.171-178.

²³ Herb, Michael, *Princes and Parliaments in the Arab world*, in: *Middle East Journal* 58, no.3 (2004), pp.367-384, p.373. As Herb himself notes, the term “constitutional monarchies” in this context merely signifies “a monarchy with an elected parliament that has not wholly usurped the monarch’s power to determine the composition of the ministry” and should not be confused with the “common[...] denot[ion] [of] a democracy decorated by a monarchy”, *Ibid.*, p. 369.

²⁴ According to the Freedom House Index 2012, all of the GCC states with the exception of the “partly free” Kuwait, are characterized as “not free”, Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2012. The Arab Uprisings and their Repercussions in the World*, available at http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Table%20of%20Independent%20Countries%2C%20FIW%202012%20draft.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁵ Michael Herb has described this special set of power distribution as “dynastic monarchy”, Herb, Michael, *All in the Family. Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999.

²⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, *Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments. A Directory*, December 2012, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/pdf-version/December2012ChiefsDirectory.pdf> [accessed 31.12.2012].

This also has effects on the GCC, where members of the Gulf dynasties likewise hold the most important positions, Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, p.59.

²⁷ See Gause, Gregory F. III, *Oil monarchies. Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, Council on Foreign Relations Press, New York, 1994, p.120 and Schwarz, Rolf, *Die Außenpolitik der arabischen Golfstaaten. Herrschaftspolitische Balanceakte unter externem Schutz*, in: Albrecht, Holger (ed.), *Der Vordere Orient. Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2007*, p.90.

²⁸ Gause, *Oil monarchies*, p.120.

3.2 Institutional Structure

In what framework do these states organize their integration efforts within the GCC? “[T]he highest authority”²⁹ within the organization is its *Supreme Council*, a body formed by the six heads of state of the member states, which, unless one member state demands otherwise, convene yearly.³⁰ Its function is to lay down the basic principles and guidelines for the policy of the GCC and it has authority over any key aspect of the organization.³¹ The vote of all heads of states has equal weight and the presidency of the Council changes annually between the member states.³² Regarding substantial decisions a consensus has to be reached and, to further underline the intergovernmental character of the GCC, decisions by the Supreme Council are not binding for the member states.³³ The sovereign and dominant role of the monarchs in the political structure of the individual GCC member states is thus transferred to the organization as a whole.³⁴ Attached to the Supreme Council is a Commission for the Settlement of Disputes, which is established “at an ‘ad hoc’ basis”.³⁵ The Ministerial Council is on the next level of the GCC hierarchy, formed by the foreign ministers and, if necessary, other ministers which meet every three months with the same rules applying to presidency and decision-making as in the Supreme Council.³⁶ It is concerned with various tasks, like the proposal of policies and recommendations, the “encourage[ment], develop[ment] and coordinat[ion] of activities existing between member states in all fields”,³⁷ and the preparation of Supreme Council meetings.³⁸

The third main institution of the GCC is the General Secretariat in Riyadh,³⁹ which is, amongst other tasks, concerned with the administrative and financial aspects of the GCC and “follows up the implementation by the member states of the resolutions and recommendations of the Supreme Council and Ministerial Council”.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the General Secretary is the official representative of the organization.⁴¹ Within the Secretariat,

²⁹ The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Secretariat General, The Charter, available at: <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=1> [accessed 31.12.2012].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Holthaus, Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation, p.55.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Secretariat General, The Charter.

³⁶ Holthaus, Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation, p.56.

³⁷ The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Secretariat General, The Charter.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Riyadh-based GCC Secretariat is financed in equal shares by all member states and has about 300 employees, The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Secretariat General, The Charter and Holthaus, Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation im Golf-Kooperationsrat, p.57.

⁴⁰ The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Secretariat General, The Charter.

⁴¹ Holthaus, Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation, p.57.

various departments exist for the different sectors of cooperation, from a Patent Bureau to Human and Environment Affairs,⁴² the most important being those for economic and political affairs. This importance is accentuated by the appointment of deputy General Secretaries in charge of these departments.⁴³

3.3 Fields of Cooperation

Out of the various sectors of cooperation within the GCC, three spheres of cooperation have emerged to be the most important ones for the organization, in rhetoric and aims as well as in practice: economic cooperation, political cooperation and security cooperation.

Economic cooperation featured as the most important part of the GCC in the public debate of its early years,⁴⁴ and, built on the Unified Economic Agreement (1981) and the Economic Agreement (2001) has made considerable progress. Early initiatives focused mainly on the free movement of persons and goods between the GCC states, and several aims in this sector, outlined in the chapter 4 of the GCC charter, “have come close to being fully realized”,⁴⁵ with steps towards the establishment of a Free Trade Area and common market status.⁴⁶ In the field of joint economic initiatives, the GCC in the framework of the Gulf Investment Cooperation (GIC) has been a successful and efficient actor in supporting the economic projects in the member states.⁴⁷ However, in other fields of economic integration progress has been slow and the actual outcomes of GCC initiatives have been meager, often not matching the ambitious aims.⁴⁸ While economic cooperation has gathered new momentum since 2000, it also has experienced several setbacks as for instance the introduction of a common currency, originally planned for in 2010, has been postponed.⁴⁹

In the field of political cooperation the record of the GCC is a mixed one too: The work of the organization as a tool for the settling of internal disputes can hardly be described as a success story.⁵⁰ The Commission for the Settlement of Disputes has never been summoned

⁴² Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, p.57.

⁴³ For a complete list see Al-Diwan Al-Amiri, *State of Kuwait, GCC Summit. About GCC*, available at: http://www.da.gov.kw/eng/articles/about_gcc.php [accessed 31.12.2012].

⁴⁴ Twinam, Joseph Wright, *The Gulf, Cooperation and The Council. An American Perspective*, Middle East Policy Council, Washington D.C., 1992, p.12.

⁴⁵ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.63-65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.66-69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57. This is actually a general characteristic of the GCC: While many far-reaching decisions are publicly proclaimed and put into charter provisions, their actual implementation is often not guaranteed, *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁴⁹ The World Bank, *Middle East and North Africa Region, Economic Integration in the GCC*, available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/GCCStudyweb.pdf> [accessed 31.12.2012], pp.6-7 and Legrenzi, *The GCC*, p.65.

⁵⁰ Gause, *Oil monarchies*, p. 132.

during the existence of the organization,⁵¹ and “intra-GCC disputes have been settled outside the GCC institutional framework.”⁵² Regarding the diplomatic cooperation of the GCC members towards external states, a common stance is often hindered by the differing foreign policy aims among the member states.⁵³ The GCC therefore primarily “acts as a loose forum on the diplomatic scene”,⁵⁴ but nevertheless can sometimes be an effective tool to enhance the political weight of individual member states on the international stage.⁵⁵

The third and maybe most interesting field of cooperation among GCC members can be found in the security arena, divided in the two fields of external and internal security cooperation. While the term has often been rejected by its leaders, the GCC states with their mutual guarantees of protection form “at least partially an alliance”,⁵⁶ and the initial goals in the realm of military cooperation were far-reaching.⁵⁷ A common military force, the so called Peninsula Shield Force was established in the 1980s, consisting of contingents of the various national armies,⁵⁸ several common military exercises have been organized and especially in the field of joint air defense several steps have been taken.⁵⁹ However, overall, while military cooperation between GCC states “has been noticeable, it has never been substantial”,⁶⁰ and it has never matched up to the rhetoric about it.⁶¹

In the related field of internal security, cooperation between the six member states is probably most advanced. While this form of cooperation is usually not organized through the GCC General Secretariat, and difficult when it comes to plots within the royal families, intelligence cooperation against shared internal threats, especially against Islamist threats, is highly developed.⁶² An internal security agreement was ratified in 1987 and is mainly concerned with the “collaboration among security services [...] issues of information exchange, extradition and propaganda aimed against regimes”.⁶³ Meetings between security officials are common in the framework of the GCC, and unlike cooperation in various other sectors,

⁵¹ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.105.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Sometimes this is even true for the various emirates of the UAE, as could be observed for instance during the Iran-Iraq war, *Ibid.*, p.93

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.110.

⁵⁵ see *Ibid.*, p.8. for the example of the UAE and its dispute with Iran.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.109.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Koch, Christian, *The GCC as Regional Security Organization*, KAS International Reports, available at: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21076-544-2-30.pdf?101110141517 [accessed 31.12.2012].

⁵⁹ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, pp.76-77.

⁶⁰ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.109.

⁶¹ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.76.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.81.

including the military field, internal security cooperation clearly has “evolved beyond symbolism”.⁶⁴

3.4 Summary

As we have seen the GCC as an organization is heavily influenced by the similar political culture of its constituents, especially by their monarchical systems, by their problematic relationships towards each other and by their common wish to retain their sovereignty, their power and the status quo in the face of shared threats.

Nevertheless, the GCC is definitely more than a mere “council of rulers”. It possesses a substantial institutional structure and the GCC states cooperate in a wide array of policy fields to a significant degree, despite the many problems the organization and its cooperation efforts face.

While economic integration is an important aspect of the GCC and featured prominently in official statements from its foundations,⁶⁵ security cooperation seems to be the focus of the organization, the less developed area of military coordination as well as the more fleshed out cooperation between the internal security services. Therefore Joseph Twinam assumptions definitely holds true that “[i]n a broader sense, of course, security was”, and still is, “what the Gulf Cooperation was all about.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.84.

⁶⁵ Twinam, *The Gulf, Cooperation and the Council*, p.12

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

4. Theoretical Foundations in Realist Thinking

But how can the emergence of an organization like this and progress in the level of cooperation between the involved states be accounted for? As mentioned in the introduction, a theory-based empirical approach to this question will be followed. The aim of the following chapter will therefore be to provide the necessary theoretical groundwork for this analysis. It will start with an explanation for the use of neorealism as the best-suited school of thought to analyze this cooperation, followed by two subchapters devoted respectively to neorealist theories concerned with external conditions as drivers of regional integration and to those theories which try to broaden this more classical approach by also including domestic conditions in their examination of the reasons for regional cooperation. While neorealism of course is an extensive school of thought with various competing currents and ideas, this thesis will mainly concentrate on the works of Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt.

4.1 Neorealism – A suitable theory for the GCC

The idea to refer to neorealist thinking to explain a regional integration organization may seem surprising at first glance due to several neorealist rationales. The essentials of neorealism can be described as such: Sovereign states are the most important actors in international relations, acting in an international system that is characterized by anarchy, i.e. the absence of a sufficiently strong power to act as a regulative factor. This nature of the international systems determines the behavior of states. Developed on the background of the Cold War, neorealism stresses that, given the anarchic structure of the international system, states are primarily concerned with their security, i.e. their survival and the protection of their integrity in a threatening setting. Contrastingly, their internal composition has no influence on their conduct in international relations, i.e. states are effectively treated as *black boxes*, whose main priorities can be described in terms of power and the pursuing of their interests in comparison to other states. Given their ignorance regarding the intentions of these other states, they always have to fear these intentions as potentially dangerous, and therefore have to acquire sufficient means to defend themselves. In this context, cooperation among states becomes highly problematic: The imperative for states in the international system is to maximize their own power and security⁶⁷ without dependency or reliance on other states who are always under the suspicion to prove themselves unreliable or treacherous partners once

⁶⁷ Whether power or security maximization is the goal of states is an disputed demand between the so called “offensive” and “defensive” neorealists, Schörnig, Niklas, Neorealismus, in: Schieder, Siegfried and Spindler, Manuela (ed.), Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen, Leske + Budrich, Opladen, 2003, p.76.

they see benefits for their own security in this course of action. “The international imperative is: ‘take care of yourself’”,⁶⁸ as Kenneth Waltz, one of the founding fathers of neorealism put it. For these reasons neorealism is usually very averse to contemplate the idea of lasting cooperation and integration between states, or groups of states, beyond the formation of short-lived defense alliances and is highly skeptical towards the durability of resulting organizational structures,⁶⁹ making it an unusual point of origin for the theoretical foundation of a thesis like this.⁷⁰

However, traditional integration theories like neo-functionalism, built on the example of the European integration, seem to only have limited applicability to extra-European settings. That is the reason why, in order to explain the so-called second wave of regional integration, starting in the 1980s around the world, of which the GCC forms one example, scholars have used “much more diverse theoretical vantage points”.⁷¹ “[T]he insertion of realism into the debate”⁷² was one aspect of these new approaches. Despite mounting criticism in recent years, especially since the end of the Cold War, neorealism is still a valuable theory for the post-Cold War world situation as for instance Carlo Masala has argued,⁷³ and for various reasons realist and neorealist theories are indeed well suited for the explanation of regional integration in the context of the GCC.

Given the conflict-ridden nature of the Middle East in general and the Gulf in particular, and the resulting prominence of security issues in the GCC states, neorealism with its focus on these factors seems like the most fitting theory school to explain their behavior in the international system. Indeed, “[i]f realism cannot explain patterns of regional cooperation in the ‘dog eat dog’ world of the modern Middle East, it is hard to believe that it can provide a generally convincing explanation for regionalism.”⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Waltz, Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw-Hill, New York et al., 1979, p.107.

⁶⁹ One should note that this general skepticism of neorealism towards cooperation among states is not entirely without a gap. This one gap can be found in the idea of a powerful hegemon, which induces cooperation by assuming the role of a paymaster and a protecting power and thereby creates incentives for other states to join this form of cooperation. Schörnig, *Neorealismus*, p.73. While the idea of Saudi Arabia functioning as the hegemonic power within the GCC has some appeal in this context at a first glance, but given the lack of evidence for this point of view and the concentration on threats in this thesis, it will not be included in this argumentation. It furthermore seems unlikely that Saudi Arabia really has the necessary power base to be considered as a dominating hegemon for the GCC states. Nevertheless Lawson assesses these ideas more closely, Lawson, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp.8-10.

⁷⁰ These and following neorealist views, as summarized by Jacobs, Andreas, *Realismus*, in: Siegfried and Spindler, Manuela (ed.), *Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen*, Leske + Budrich, Opladen, 2003 and Schörnig, *Neorealismus*, are mainly based on the works of Kenneth Waltz.

⁷¹ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.105.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Masala, Carlo, *Neorealismus und Internationale Politik im 21. Jahrhundert*, in: *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 16, no. 1 (2006), pp.87-111.

⁷⁴ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.107.

Secondly, the aforementioned fact that foreign policy in the Arab Gulf monarchies lies in the hand of a small group of individuals, who usually do not have to take the opinions of economic and societal actors within their states into consideration for their decision-making, the neorealist view of states as *black boxes* is not as problematic as in the case of other states. On a last note for the argument of neorealism as a fitting theory for an analysis of Gulf politics, the focus on security issues is not just widespread among scholars of Gulf politics, but it also features predominantly in the minds of foreign policy makers in the GCC.⁷⁵

This explains, why neorealism is one of the main analytical currents in the various attempts to explain the evolution of the GCC, but nevertheless one should also note the shortcomings and boundaries it has even in a Middle Eastern setting. One strand of criticism of neorealism has noted the problems it has to explain the occurrence of dynamic developments and drastic upheavals.⁷⁶ For instance, neorealism would not have been able in any way to predict or explain the appearance of the Arab Spring protests in 2010/11. Furthermore, neorealism also has difficulties with the explanation of sub-state actors and their role in politics, which is of course extremely problematic given the enormous consequences the emergence of terrorist groups had on the Gulf region during the last decades. Effectively these two points of criticism can be combined to the conclusion that the main obstacle for neorealism to be a comprehensive theory of Gulf politics and of regional integration in the Gulf region is the notion of states as *black boxes*. This is the reason why, after looking in a first part of the following chapter at theories which try to explain regional integration by an analysis of traditional neorealist external factors, it will subsequently be tried to broaden the theoretical viewpoint of this thesis by including neorealist authors and ideas that also take internal factors as drivers of regional integration into account. As will be argued, this is not a breach with - or an abandonment of - neorealism, but is absolutely within the boundaries of this school of thought, and, in some ways, a logical step towards the enhancement of its explanatory power.

⁷⁵ Nakleh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp.50-59.

⁷⁶ Schörnig, *Neorealismus*, p.81.

4.2 Neorealist Alliance Theory - External Threats as drivers of Regional Integration

So what does neorealism offer for an explanation of the cooperation of the six Arab Gulf monarchies in the GCC? On a first glance not that much, as the two main authors on whom this thesis is going to concentrate in these considerations, Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt, do not address regional integration organizations directly in their works, and the issue has not generally featured prominently in neorealist thinking over the last decades.

However, one of the key phenomena that neorealism tries to explain is the formation of alliances among states.

While the GCC, as seen above, is definitely more than a simple alliance between states and its leaders have often rejected this term in the description of their organization,⁷⁷ the prevalence of security issues nevertheless shows that the GCC shares several characteristics with conventional alliances. At least for the sake of these theoretical considerations we can therefore assume that the reasons and conditions that led to the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council are comparable to those that cause the formation of alliances, and therefore neorealist alliance theories are applicable to account for the formation of the GCC.⁷⁸

Classical neorealism explains the formation of alliances by referring to the concept of a balance of power, as Kenneth Waltz in his fundamental works on neorealism perceives it as the driving force that compels states to form alliances. A balance of power is desirable for states as only under the conditions of such a balance of power a security system can be stable, as it deters potential aggressors.⁷⁹ Stephen Walt in his works, on which the following chapter will focus, modifies this view and replaces the idea of a balance of power with the concept of a balance of threats, of which power only constitutes one aspect. Before a closer look at this concept and the way it affects the behavior of states and their alliance preferences and priorities is taken, it might be helpful to examine the exact definition of a threat.

Walt identifies four factors influencing the “level of threat”⁸⁰ one state poses: “aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.”⁸¹

Aggregate power can be measured in traditional categories of power, i.e. the amount of resources, be they in terms of population, of military and economic capabilities or technological, a state has at his disposal. “Because the ability to project power declines with

⁷⁷ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.109.

⁷⁸ For a closer description of this link between regional (economic) integration and alliance theory see *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁷⁹ Schörnig, *Neorealismus*, p.70.

⁸⁰ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.22.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

distance,”⁸² geographic proximity is a second element of the level of threat. States are more likely to perceive another state as threatening when it is located in their neighborhood. The third component of a threat is closely related to these two: Offensive Power. Walt defines it as “the ability to threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of another state at an acceptable cost.”⁸³ The last factor of a threatening state are its aggressive intentions, i.e. whether it is perceived by the other states as harboring aggressive and offensive tendencies towards them.⁸⁴

A combination of these four factors determines the level of threat of a state in the international system. It cannot be determined which of the four sources of threat is the most important one, as “one can say only that all of them are likely to play a role.”⁸⁵

According to Stephen Walt alliances “are most commonly viewed as a response to threats, yet there is sharp disagreement as to what that response will be.”⁸⁶ Two strategic options are available to states which see themselves threatened by another state, and these two options differ sharply in their preconditions, motivations and outcomes.

The first strategy can be subsumed under the term *balancing*. Balancing describes the idea that states, when they are facing a threatening state, form or “join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat.”⁸⁷ If they would not form an alliance to counterbalance a potentially hegemonic state, they would risk their survival in an anarchic world.⁸⁸ They therefore join weaker states in an alliance against the stronger side. In the words of Kenneth Waltz, “[s]econdary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition they form achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.”⁸⁹

The antithetic strategy to balancing is described as *bandwagoning* behavior. The basic idea behind this approach is that “states are attracted to strength”.⁹⁰ They are more likely to ally with the stronger side, i.e. a powerful and threatening state, than with its weaker opponents.

⁸² Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25-28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.26

⁸⁶ Walt, Stephen, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, in: *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985), pp.3-43, p.4.

⁸⁷ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 127.

⁹⁰ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.20.

Bandwagoning is rooted in an appeasement policy, as “by aligning with an ascendant state or coalition, the bandwagoner may hope to avoid an attack by diverting it elsewhere.”⁹¹

While we can therefore say that “the greater the threat, the greater the probability that the vulnerable state will seek an alliance“,⁹² it is unclear which of these two strategies states pursue. Traditional neorealist authors like Waltz mainly follow the idea of states that are balancing against stronger powers in their wish to establish the above mentioned ideal condition of a balance of power. As Stephen Walt in *The Origins of Alliances* concentrates on threats according to the four mentioned criteria, whether states show balancing or bandwagoning behavior is also partially rooted in the nature of the threat they are facing. Aggregate power, geographic proximity and offensive power capabilities are more or less neutral in this aspect and can cause both balancing and bandwagoning behavior, and which of them prevails depends on the situation of the involved countries.⁹³ For instance, offensive power usually offers strong incentives for other states to show balancing behavior, but if the offensive capabilities of the threatening state are so overwhelming that they “permit[...] rapid conquest, vulnerable states may see little hope in resisting.”⁹⁴ In this scenario balancing is no longer a viable option, as potential allies might not be able to help quickly enough in the event of an attack.⁹⁵ The result is bandwagoning behavior that accounts for the creation of a sphere of influence around a threatening country with a high amount of offensive power.

The fourth component of a threat, aggressive intention, is different in this aspect, as it causes an inherent preference for concerned states towards balancing behavior. The incentives for bandwagoning behavior are eliminated if a state is “believed to be unalterably aggressive”,⁹⁶ because in this case its intentions cannot be changed by allying with it and any form of appeasement would be a pointless, lost cause. “Thus the more aggressive or expansionist a state appears to be, the more likely it is to trigger an opposing coalition.”⁹⁷

So which strategy do states follow more often? Given the fact that bandwagoning is dangerous due to the insurmountable uncertainty regarding the benevolent intentions of a threatening state, balancing is the norm in international relations.⁹⁸ Bandwagoning is prevalent only when the concerned states are very weak in comparison to the threatening one, if no potential allies are available or if they defect from the perceived losing side during times

⁹¹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.21.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.22-26.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

of war.⁹⁹ As Walt has shown in his examination of Middle Eastern alliance patterns, this is true for the Arab world too, where “balancing is far more common than bandwagoning.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Middle Eastern regional powers usually balance against threats in their neighborhood by other regional actors, and are indifferent towards the global power distribution.¹⁰¹ They often follow the most usual form of alliance formation, by trying “to counter threats by adding the power of another state to their own”,¹⁰² be they superpowers or other regional states.

Walt mentions the Gulf Cooperation Council as one of the prominent examples of balancing in reaction to a foreign threat,¹⁰³ and it will be one task of the empirical part of this thesis to examine whether or not this claim proves true and the foundation and extension of cooperation within the framework of the GCC can in fact be seen as balancing behavior by the involved states.

4.3. Opening the black box – Domestic Threats as drivers of Regional Integration

However, focusing this thesis solely on these ideas is a potentially very limited approach and may fall short in the explanation of many important drivers and motivations behind the emergence of the GCC, as it completely excludes the wide array of domestic factors that may well have been equally important, or may even have dominated.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the following chapter will open up the *black box* of the state and look at conditions in the internal composition of states that may account for increased cooperation between states in the Gulf. Some clarifications regarding the neorealist nature of these approaches are necessary. For Kenneth Waltz, the international system itself and the international anarchy is the third level of analysis or “image”, as he calls them, after the first two, ‘subsystemic’ levels, the individual human behavior and the internal structure of states.¹⁰⁵ It is from the nature and structure of the international system – the systemic level – that neorealism draws its most important and most basic assumptions regarding the behavior of states. Therefore, all attempts to introduce subsystemic elements into the analysis have drawn criticism on them

⁹⁹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp.29-32.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.149. The other form of balancing Walt distinguishes, balancing in terms of image and legitimacy, will be analyzed in the chapter on domestic threats.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹⁰⁴ For the importance of domestic factors in the alignment of developing countries see David, Steven R., *Explaining Third World Alignment*, in: *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991), pp.233-256.

¹⁰⁵ For this order and structure see Waltz, Kenneth N., *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1959.

and have been accused by some neorealist authors to contribute to a degeneration of neorealism.¹⁰⁶ But, as for instance Carlo Masala has commented, one important aspect of Waltz's theories is overlooked in these accounts: That it is an attempt to explain several characteristics of the international system, but that it cannot - and does not even have the intention - to explain the foreign policy of specific states.¹⁰⁷ As Waltz himself has noted, it is necessary for some problems, e.g. the analysis of the specific foreign policy of a nation, to take a look at the "internal dispositions"¹⁰⁸ of individual states,¹⁰⁹ i.e. to open up the *black box*. As exactly this is the intention of this thesis, this step is necessary for the analysis and does not run counter to the neorealist basics of this work.

In this it is in good companionship, as many works of authors describing themselves as neorealists have included some form of subsystemic factors in their analysis, causing Andrew Moravcsik and Jeffrey Legro to pose the question "Is anybody still a realist?"¹¹⁰ ¹¹¹ On authors like this the following considerations will be based, in which I will focus on the classical works of Stephen Walt¹¹² and a more recent account of Scott Cooper and Brock Taylor.¹¹³

For the aspect of domestic threats as factor of alliance formation and therefore regional integration in the GCC, it is necessary to put aside global characteristics and conditions about alliance formations and to have a look at key characteristics of the involved states, i.e. Arab conservative monarchies. The idea that like-minded states, i.e. states with a similar internal structure and a similar ideological basis are more likely to bond features in realist theories dating back up to Hans Morgenthau's concept of ideological solidarity.¹¹⁴ Walt identifies one part of the logic behind this widely-held belief in the idea, that "alignment with similar states may enhance the legitimacy of a weak regime by demonstrating that it is part of a large, popular movement."¹¹⁵ Hereby the term *legitimacy* enters the picture, a key concept whose importance can hardly be overestimated for Arab states in general and Arab monarchies in particular, as a high degree of legitimacy for their rule is one of the key assets that allows

¹⁰⁶ Masala, *Neorealismus und Internationale Politik*, p.92.

¹⁰⁷ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.40.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁰⁹ "Structurally we can describe and understand the pressures states are subject to. We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures without knowledge of their internal dispositions.", *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Legro, Jeffrey W. and Moravcsik, Andrew, *Is anybody still a realist?*, in: *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999), pp.5-55.

¹¹¹ Schörnig, *Neorealismus*, p.85.

¹¹² Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.

¹¹³ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*.

¹¹⁴ Stephen Walt refers to these ideas and the term, Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.33.

¹¹⁵ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp.34-35.

monarchical rulers to keep the power in their country firmly in their hand and their grip on their societies intact.¹¹⁶

Walt points out that, unlike socialism and pan-Arabism, a common monarchical identity is one of the “unifying ideologies” in international relations, as monarchical legitimacy is based “on the traditional or divine right of kings. Because the principles of monarchical [...] rule grant legitimate authority over one’s own domain but imply no such authority over the domain of others, alliances between monarchies [...] are not torn by ideological conflicts.”¹¹⁷

On the contrary, monarchies are able to collaborate in order to strengthen their respective legitimacy and popularity, and are especially prone to do so if their legitimacy is under pressure. As Walt puts it, if regimes feel weak or unstable they “may try to enhance their popularity (and attract external support) by seeking membership in a large and popular movement”.¹¹⁸ “States lacking domestic legitimacy will be more likely to seek ideological alliances to increase internal and external support.”¹¹⁹ They have an “interest in collaborating to oppose any movements that do threaten their legitimacy”,¹²⁰ and therefore “we can expect regimes whose legitimacy is precarious to enter ideologically based alliances”.¹²¹ The principal source of solidarity among monarchies is in this point of view the common “threat from revolutionary movements”.¹²²

Since ideological movements, if they are striving for the downfall of a specific political order, “can pose every bit as significant a threat as that posed by military power”,¹²³ they can also trigger balancing alliance behavior by concerned states.¹²⁴ In fact, “many ideological alliances may just be balancing alliances in disguise if they have been formed to oppose the spread of a hostile ideology.”¹²⁵ The more stable the general security situation is, the more important these ideological considerations become in the formation of alliances. Under a very direct military threat, states are more prone to take any available alliance partners despite ideological differences.¹²⁶ It will be one of the primary goals of my case studies to examine if

¹¹⁶ “The central problem of government today in the Arab World is Political legitimacy”, Hudson, Michael, *Arab Politics. The Search for Legitimacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, p.2. As for instance Hoyt, Paul D., *Legitimacy, Identity, and Politician Development in the Arab World*, in: *Mershon International Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (1997), pp.173-176, p.173 has argued, this still holds true for today.

¹¹⁷ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp.36-37.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.37.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.213.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.40

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.37-39.

these assumptions are able to withstand an empirical test and were one of the key motivations behind the formation of the GCC.

Cooper and Taylor in their article *Power and Regionalism* also argue along this line, but bring several new approaches into the debate. In their perception, the main flaw in Walt's Balance-of-threat theory is its "mischaracteriz[ation of] the GCC as primarily an alliance",¹²⁷ and it therefore has failed to catch the "hybrid nature of the GCC",¹²⁸ with its strong degree of economic cooperation alongside the military sector.¹²⁹ They discard the view of the GCC as essentially an alliance by pointing out the limited progress in the actual implementation of the far-fetched goals in this sector, and also provide an explanation for this.

They develop the argument that the emergence of the GCC "is more closely related to the *domestic[emphasis in the original]* threats facing GCC regimes than to an external [...] military threat."¹³⁰ This conclusion is mainly drawn from the events surrounding the emergence of the GCC in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1979, a case that will also be examined below. In this point of view the GCC is an attempt by Gulf leaders to gain strength through increased unity, in the face of a domestically threatening scenario.¹³¹ Therefore the lack of substantial military cooperation can be explained, as an extension of the military aspect of the GCC would run counter to the regime stability of the Gulf monarchies, given their traditional fear of a centralized strong military,¹³² and thus would not be in line with the key motivations behind the formation of the GCC.¹³³

Instead, the equally important focus of cooperation in the domestic security cooperation and the economic field has helped the GCC states to retain their domestic stability mainly through three mechanisms: by means of increased legitimacy, intelligence sharing and economic benefits.¹³⁴

The effect on legitimacy is similar to the one described by Walt. The Gulf community, as a concept that resorts to ideas about an Islamic community and a pan-Arab endeavor that partially undoes the division of the Gulf region by the imperialist powers, significantly strengthens the legitimacy of the Gulf monarchies.¹³⁵ This helps the ruling regimes to retain

¹²⁷ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.113.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.117.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.120, Legrenzi even speaks of "the need to 'coup-proof' their military forces", Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.48. and pp.143-144.

¹³³ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.108.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.117-119.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.118.

the image of legitimate leadership in the eyes of their populations and to keep themselves stable in turbulent and dangerous times.

The GCC as a platform for intelligence sharing becomes an important tool for the domestic stability of the involved states due to the primarily transnational origin of subversive movements against their rule,¹³⁶ stemming from the strong transnational identities in the region.¹³⁷ Prior to the formation of the GCC this seriously hampered the ability of the respective national security services to monitor and combat such movements, which might arise beyond the extent of their own national territory.¹³⁸ The aforementioned extensive intelligence cooperation between the GCC states therefore offers the perfect opportunity for the monarchical regimes to keep their domestic security apparatuses effective in the preservation of their domestic order and their internal stability.¹³⁹

The third aspect is maybe the most interesting one: Economic benefits through cooperation as a way to fend off domestic threats. The GCC was “formulated to allow Gulf regimes to provide economic benefits to [...] their most restive populations”.¹⁴⁰ The distribution of economic benefits to their population is of paramount importance for the domestic politics of the rentier states and societies of the Gulf monarchies. In the wake of the oil boom “government welfare programs became the typical response to civil unrest.”¹⁴¹ However, this strategy is extremely expensive to maintain, especially for the smaller monarchies with only limited oil revenues.¹⁴² The economic cooperation within the GCC and its regional investment programs are an important tool to facilitate these expenditures and to improve the economic opportunities of dissatisfied internal groups, as it distributes the burdens of this policy on all GCC states.¹⁴³ The wealthier states within the organization have an interest in this form of cooperation, given their common interest in the stability and maintenance of royal rule in all GCC states, and the fact, that a threat to one of them is a threat to all of them.

¹³⁶ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.118.

¹³⁷ Gause, F. Gregory III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge et al., 2010, p.1.

¹³⁸ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.118.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.119.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

4.4. Summary

Various conclusions can be seen as the quintessence from these neorealist theoretical considerations. First of all, neorealism has proven itself as a valuable theory school to provide mechanisms and motivations for the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Especially the idea of a balancing reaction at the basis of the emergence of the GCC has explanatory potential.

The first hypothesis gained from this chapter is therefore that the GCC states engaged in regional cooperation in a balancing reaction to rising threats to their common security and to the survival of their regimes.

Secondly, this balancing is not just directed against direct external threats from other states, but also directed against problematic domestic groups and threatening transnational ideologies. From these two points of origin a general hypothesis regarding the pattern of cooperation within the framework of the GCC can be deduced: If the level of threat for the Gulf monarchies, be it from within or without, rises, their willingness to cooperate and to agree to further integration efforts increases. Opposed to this, we can also assume an antithetic correlation between the level of threat and cooperation: Once the level of threat recedes and the immediate danger has passed, the monarchies might be more inclined to rediscover the importance of their national sovereignty as the incentives to cooperate are decreasing, resulting in the delay or abandonment of initiatives for closer integration within the GCC.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ This line of thought is for example presented by Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.79 and p.111, Gause, *Oil monarchies*, p.130 and Aarts, Paul, *The Middle East. Eternally Out of Step with History?*, in: Thomas, Kenneth P. And Tétreault, Mary Ann (ed.), *Racing to Regionalize. Democracy, Capitalism, and Regional Political Economy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London et al., 1999, p.202.

5. Case studies

Are these theoretical assumptions valid explanations for the actual historical proceedings that led to development in the GCC? As a full analysis of the three decades of the existence of the GCC would go way beyond the scope of this thesis, a case studies approach which has a closer look at two selected time periods is the best way to test the validity of the assumptions. The first case that will be examined is the time before, during and immediately after the emergence of the GCC as an organization in 1981, as it is maybe the most telling example of the correlation between times of external and domestic threats and the resulting increasing cooperation between the Gulf monarchies. As the formulation of the description of these case studies already shows, it is also beyond the scope of this thesis to try to show a direct empirical causality between these two factors. Given the immense scope of the involved actors, interests and objectives, the identification of a pattern of correlation seems a sufficient and more achievable aim.

But this thesis is not just an examination of threats as factors for the formation of the GCC, it also tries to show that these patterns did not just disappear once the common organization was formed and that they are still the dominant drivers behind the success and failure of integration initiatives in the region. Therefore a second, more recent case study seems to be necessary. Several potential time periods come to mind, most notably the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf war,¹⁴⁵ the instability in Iraq after the US intervention of 2003, the resulting unrest and civil-war like situation in the country and the emergence of a Shi'a dominated government, the unresolved dispute over the Iranian nuclear program and the increasing threat of transnational terrorism since the 9/11 attacks, committed mostly by citizens of GCC states.¹⁴⁶ However, the last epoch-making chain of events in the Middle East, most commonly referred to in the West as the Arab Spring of 2010/11, appears to offer the most interesting insights into the functioning of the Gulf Cooperation Council and furthermore has the advantage of being the most recent example of a threatening situation that had tremendous implications for the GCC.

Both case studies will start with a short outline of the historical setting and events, will assess the general nature of the international and domestic threat for the Gulf monarchies and will

¹⁴⁵ This is maybe the most telling example of threats as drivers of regional integration in the GCC that is not examined in this thesis. For a short overview see Gause, Gregory, *Oil monarchies*, pp.129-130 and Murden, Simon, *Emergent Regional Powers and International Relations in the Gulf. 1988-1991*, Ithaca Press, Reading, 1995, pp.219-220.

¹⁴⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of the various threats facing the Gulf monarchies in the 21st century (albeit with a focus on Saudi Arabia), see Cordesman, Anthony H. and Obaid, Nawaf, *National Security in Saudi-Arabia. Threats, Responses and Challenges*, Westport, 2005, pp. 1-136.

show what practical implications they had on the GCC with a description of the way integration between GCC states changed in the relevant time period.

5.1 Containing the Revolution - The Emergence of the GCC

5.1.1 The General Situation

What can be called a Gulf Regional Security System¹⁴⁷ emerged with the end of British dominance in the region after the Second World War, and gained its full complexity with the independence of the smaller Arab monarchies from Britain in 1961 (Kuwait) and 1971 (Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and the emirates of the UAE). The security situation of the Gulf was characterized by its tripolar structure within the global bipolar Cold War: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq were the principal powers in the region and tried to gain influence in the arising power vacuum left behind after the British withdrawal and the American unwillingness to adopt a similar role in the region.¹⁴⁸

The monarchies in Iran and Saudi Arabia, loosely connected by their pro-Western attitude and their general contentedness with the status quo¹⁴⁹ formed the so called *twin pillars*, on which the western hopes for stability in the region lasted. Ba'athist Iraq, with close connections to the Soviet Union and dedicated to the cause of Arab nationalism was the main opponent to this arrangement until 1975, when it took a more accommodating stance towards Iran and the Gulf monarchies. Thus, all major states in the region, while mistrust and hostilities were recurrent, were dedicated to the general goal of stability, respected their respective legitimacy and did not try to undermine their domestic stability. In this constellation, the Shah's Iran played the dominant part and could usually achieve its goals,¹⁵⁰ functioning as a "regional policeman."¹⁵¹ With the exception of the Dhufar rebellion in Oman, which could only be subdued in 1975, the result was a predominantly stable situation throughout most of the decade, which oversaw an unprecedented rise in the wealth of the Gulf states due to the so called oil-revolution.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ See Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 1-15 for the argument that the Gulf Region constitutes a separate security system.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.16-44.

¹⁴⁹ Kechichian, Joseph A., *The Gulf Cooperation Council. Search for Security*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1985), pp.853-881, p.853.

¹⁵⁰ Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.25-44.

This period of relative stability suddenly came to an end with the epoch-making year of 1979 and the Iranian Revolution. The Shah was overthrown in January/February 1979 and a Shi'a Islamic Republic was proclaimed under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The neighboring Gulf states were soon to feel the reverberations of these events.¹⁵³ The ascendancy of a revolutionary movement to the leadership of the strongest state in the region, with the declared intention to export this revolution, made the twin pillar strategy collapse and shook the regional security system as a whole.¹⁵⁴

This tense situation was further intensified by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December to support their local client regime and by Iraq's invasion of Iran in September 1980, which triggered the "longest and most devastating war in modern Middle Eastern history."¹⁵⁵ The Iran-Iraq war was to drag on until 1988, with shifting fortunes of war and high casualties on both sides.¹⁵⁶ Several Gulf monarchies, with war erupting directly at their borders, financially supported the Iraqi side,¹⁵⁷ and in the course of the so called Tanker war warfare was conducted within the waters of the Gulf itself.

5.1.2 The Threat

As this short and superficial account already shows, the Gulf monarchies faced turbulent times at the turn of the decade from 1979-1982. If we follow the assumption of this thesis that threats are the main driver of regional integration in the Gulf region, a closer examination of these threats is in order. Given the above mentioned situation it is obvious that, while various other threatening settings were also existing and the perceptions of these dangers varied among the GCC states,¹⁵⁸ the Iranian revolution and subsequently the Iran-Iraq war were the paramount threat for the Gulf monarchies during the formation period of the GCC.¹⁵⁹

For an assessment of the extent of the external threat Iran posed, we can apply Walt's four constituents of a threat. In terms of geographic proximity, Iran definitely posed a potential threat to the GCC states, given the facts that the Gulf is merely 39 kilometers wide at its narrowest point, the Strait of Hormuz, and that Iran since 1971 controls several strategic

¹⁵³ Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.46.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.45-57.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

¹⁵⁸ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, 1988, p.60 mentions South Yemen, the Soviet Union and the tripartite axis of Libya, South Yemen and Ethiopia as other existing threats.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

islands in the Gulf.¹⁶⁰ Given the aggregate power and offensive capabilities of Iran, one has to state that these two factors actually were reduced by the Iranian revolution, as the emergent Islamist republic was entangled in serious domestic conflicts and soon on the defensive in its bitter and costly war with Iraq.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless the Iranian military was still a large formation and well equipped, and Iran again assessed its status as “a real military threat”¹⁶² with its offensives in 1981 and the successful expulsion of Iraqi forces from most of its territory in the following year.¹⁶³ But the most important shift definitely occurred in the fourth factor, the aggressive intentions. As mentioned above, the new Iranian leadership soon declared its wish to export its revolution and its hostile intentions towards the monarchical regimes on the Southern shores of the Gulf.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore Iranian politicians renewed territorial claims on several territories, most importantly on the island of Bahrain, which previously had been abandoned by the Shah.¹⁶⁵ All things considered we can therefore state, that while the offensive capabilities of Iran may have been blunted in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the general level of threat posed by Iran on the GCC states increased to a significant degree when the Shah was overthrown.

In the domestic field, the implications of the Islamic revolution can not be underestimated either. “The very fact that a mass-based, Islamist social revolution had occurred in the neighborhood was an implicit threat to [...] the monarchical Arab states.”¹⁶⁶ The general revival of Islam in the wake of the Revolution posed a severe menace to the Islamic legitimacy of the conservative monarchies,¹⁶⁷ especially since Khomeini denounced monarchy as a “non-Islamic” concept.¹⁶⁸ “In 1979 Islam with Iran as its standard-bearer appeared irresistible and irrepressible, an incipient tidal-wave.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, while eventually all Iranian attempts to spread its revolutionary ideas throughout the Islamic world were unsuccessful, the immediate threats they posed to the domestic stability of its neighbors were immense.

¹⁶⁰ Cordesman, National Security in Saudi-Arabia, pp.52-53.

¹⁶¹ Cooper, Power and Regionalism, p.112.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Gause, The International Relations of the Persian Gulf, p.66.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁶⁵ Ramazani, The Gulf Cooperation Council, p.7.

¹⁶⁶ Gause, The International Relations of the Persian Gulf, p.86.

¹⁶⁷ For the importance and function of Islam as a source of legitimacy for the Gulf monarchies see Gause, Oil monarchies, p.41.

¹⁶⁸ Gause, The International Relations of the Persian Gulf, p.50.

¹⁶⁹ Chubin, Sharam, Iran and the Persian Gulf States, in: Menashri, David, The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World, Westview Press, Boulder et al., 1990, p.74

5.1.3 The Implications for the development of the GCC

But to what extent were these events important factors in the development of the GCC? And can this organization rightfully be seen as a balancing reaction against them?

While first steps towards cooperation between the Gulf states and towards the establishment of a common organization to organize this cooperation date back to the 60s and 70s there is little doubt that the threatening setting at the turn of the decade 1979-1982 provided an indispensable impetus for integration and played a major factor in the realization of these aspirations. “The birth of the GCC was not inevitable. [...] [T]he pre-GCC tradition of cooperation greatly facilitated the post-GCC activities, especially in nonmilitary fields, but they did not in themselves provide the necessary stimulus for creating the GCC.”¹⁷⁰

As R.K.Ramazani has argued, the experience with domestic unrest in the aftermath of Iran’s Islamic Revolution constituted this necessary stimulus and therefore was “the decisive factor behind [the] formation”¹⁷¹ of the GCC, and the external threat of the First Gulf war acted as a “catalyst”,¹⁷² further speeding up this process. And indeed there is a marked chronological correlation between these two factors and progress in the negotiations towards the formation of the GCC.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed in April 1979, and the Gulf regimes were to feel the repercussions of this “pivot of modern Middle Eastern history”¹⁷³ later this year. Shi’ites form a sizeable minority in Kuwait, Saudi-Arabia (where their position as a majority in the oil-producing Saudi eastern provinces makes them an especially important factor),¹⁷⁴ the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman, and they form the majority of the population in Bahrain.¹⁷⁵ To obtain reliable data on the actual proportion of Shi’ites in the Gulf States is almost impossible given the deliberate opacity of the ruling Sunni regimes in these affairs, but nevertheless it is obvious that Shi’ites form a crucially relevant groups for the security of these Gulf states, especially in Bahrain and Saudi-Arabia. During the summer of 1979 Iranian propaganda campaigns were directed at restive population groups in the Gulf states,¹⁷⁶ especially Shi’ites, and first demonstrations, in which sometimes pictures of Khomeini were

¹⁷⁰ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*. p.10.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Gause, *The International Relations of the Gulf*, p.45.

¹⁷⁴ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.114.

¹⁷⁵ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.200. For details and the case of Bahrain see footnote no. 19.

¹⁷⁶ For instance through radio campaigns and leaflets, Heard-Bey, Frauke, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten im Zeichen der islamischen Revolution. Innen-, außen- und sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit im Golf-Rat*, Europa Union Verlag, Bonn, 1983, p.51.

displayed, occurred.¹⁷⁷ This was accompanied by open calls of Iranian high-ranking officials to overthrow regimes in the Gulf states.¹⁷⁸ The demonstrations in Saudi Arabia peaked in November 1979 and during the first months of 1980, and were met with a heavy intervention by the security forces, showing the nervousness of the Saudi regime.¹⁷⁹ At around the same time, similar demonstrations occurred in Kuwait¹⁸⁰ and Bahrain.¹⁸¹

The danger for the Saudi monarchy was amplified by the encroachment of Islamist ideas on Sunni groups. The occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Sunni fundamentalists in November 1979 could only be resolved after weeks of bitter fighting, an event that severely undermined the claim of the Saudi King to be the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques.¹⁸² In reaction to these threats the Gulf monarchies not only tried to raise their own muslim image,¹⁸³ but also embarked upon a course of closer cooperation with their neighbors.

The first step towards the foundation of the GCC can be seen in various visits of the Kuwaiti prime minister (and crown prince), Saad al-Abdullah in December 1978, as domestic unrest reached unprecedented levels in Iran, to the other Gulf states to “discuss means of Gulf cooperation”,¹⁸⁴ triggering “[i]ntensive consultation among the six”.¹⁸⁵ In October 1979 the foreign ministers of the future GCC states met in Taif in Saudi Arabia to discuss issues of “mutual defense and political stability.”¹⁸⁶ When the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War removed the issue that had hindered any previous attempts of a Gulf cooperation organization - the problematic but necessary exclusion of Iran and Iraq from any settlement, as they could now be blocked from the organization on accounts of neutrality in their armed conflict and because they were preoccupied with the conduct of their war -¹⁸⁷ the next steps could be taken. On the occasion of an Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit meeting in January 1981, again in Taif, the general decision to form the GCC was taken during informal bilateral

¹⁷⁷ Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, p.17.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.62

¹⁸¹ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.7.

¹⁸² Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.116. For a description of the Siege of the Mosque, the ideological background of the attackers and their legacy see Hegghamm, Thomas and Lacroix, Stéphane, *Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia. The Story of Juhayman Al-'Utaybi Revisited*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007), pp.103-122.

¹⁸³ Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, p.25.

¹⁸⁴ Assiri, Abdul-Reda, *Kuwait's Foreign Policy. City-State in World Politics*, Westview Press, Boulder et al., 1990, p.76.

¹⁸⁵ Twinam, *The Gulf, Cooperation and the Council*, p.73.

¹⁸⁶ Assiri, *Kuwait's Foreign Policy*, p.76.

¹⁸⁷ Twinam, *Reflections on Gulf Cooperation. with focus on Bahrain, Qatar and Oman*, in: Sandwick, John A. (ed.), *The Gulf Cooperation Council. Moderation and Stability in an Interdependent World*, Westview Press, Boulder et al., 1987, pp.29-30.

talks.¹⁸⁸ The following month, at a conference of the foreign ministers in Riyadh, the general guidelines for the GCC were agreed upon, and in March, at a similar meeting in Muscat, the text of the GCC charter was decided upon, to be formally signed by the heads of state at the end of the month in Abu Dhabi. During these meetings “questions of security were high on the agenda of the Gulf leaders”,¹⁸⁹ and in May a GCC Working Paper outlined an important motivation behind the foundation of the GCC: “International designs will not be able to find a foothold in a merged region which has one voice, opinion and strength. However, they will be able to find a thousand footholds if this region [...] remains made up of small entities, that can be easily victimized.”¹⁹⁰ While this sentence is formulated in a slightly different context, it does not take much fantasy to deduce that the notion of “international designs” was primarily directed against Iran and the Iranian attempts to fuel domestic unrest in the Gulf states.¹⁹¹

However, these seemingly unanimous procedures should not hide the fact that there was serious disagreement about the question what exactly the GCC should be. Three models were under discussion: While Oman envisaged the GCC as a comprehensive security endeavor, which should maintain close ties with the West, Kuwait stressed the importance of non-alignment in the Cold War and was to reject several attempts for cooperation in security affairs.¹⁹² The Saudi conception of the GCC was more or less “a middle course between the Omani and Kuwaiti extremes”,¹⁹³ and especially emphasized the importance of collaboration to preserve the internal stability of the Gulf monarchies.¹⁹⁴ Which of these differing conceptions over the nature and intent of the GCC the six states were to follow shaped the debate during the formation years of their common organization.

Probably due to these differing conceptions, the GCC organs during most of 1981 were primarily concerned with the introduction of a wide array of cooperation, mainly in the economic field and in the coordination of their foreign policy in pan-Arab issues.¹⁹⁵ Security issues and cooperation in this field were however soon to return to the agenda, as the level of threat reached its highest peak after the 1979 events in the autumn of 1981, which was to cause a marked shift of the GCC towards security cooperation as the most important aspect of

¹⁸⁸ Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, pp.176-177.

¹⁸⁹ Kechichian, *The Gulf Cooperation Council. Search for Security*, p.877.

¹⁹⁰ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.29.

¹⁹¹ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.117.

¹⁹² Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, pp.182-184.

the organization.¹⁹⁶ The threat was twofold: First of all, Iran in September started its first offensive,¹⁹⁷ which, while not yet as successful as those of the next year, already provided a warning signal to the Gulf regimes. But, more importantly, in December 1981 plans by a militant group with allegedly close ties to the Iranian regime were discovered to overthrow the ruling regime in Bahrain.¹⁹⁸ After this event “[c]oordination among the Gulf monarchies on security issues at both the bilateral and the GCC levels intensified.”¹⁹⁹ The failed coup d’état made the Bahraini leadership, previously “devout disciples of the political and economic aspects of Gulf cooperation, ‘reborn’ in their enthusiasm for the security aspects.”²⁰⁰ The immediate reaction was a plea by the General Secretary of the GCC towards closer cooperation in the face of subversive Iranian efforts²⁰¹ and the conclusion of bilateral internal security agreements between Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states with the exception of Kuwait.²⁰² The negative response of Kuwait to a similar agreement, probably caused by the fear that it might endanger the relatively open nature of the Kuwaiti political system, was the reason why such an agreement could not be achieved on the GCC level and that Saudi proposals to that effect were not accepted.²⁰³ “The net effect was a working GCC internal security arrangement, with a Kuwaiti reservation as to making it formal.”²⁰⁴ Kuwait was later to give up its opposition in this matter and to comply with comprehensive GCC internal security efforts after an 1985 assassination attempt against its ruler and a series of bomb attacks²⁰⁵ demonstrated its vulnerability to internal subversion.²⁰⁶ It also changed its averse position towards military cooperation once the Tanker War in the Gulf increasingly became dangerous,²⁰⁷ and the military occupation of the island of Faw at its border reinforced the Iranian threat.²⁰⁸

After the Bahrain coup attempt economic cooperation was strengthened during 1982 and in November 1982 the Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC) was established.²⁰⁹ These steps can be seen as an attempt to improve the economic lot of underprivileged populations groups in

¹⁹⁶ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.192.

¹⁹⁷ Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, p.112.

¹⁹⁸ Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.72.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Twinam, *Reflections on Gulf Cooperation*, p.37.

²⁰¹ Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, p.185.

²⁰² Twinam, *Reflections on Gulf Cooperation*, p.37.

²⁰³ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp.35-36.

²⁰⁴ Twinam, *Reflections on Gulf Cooperation*, p.37.

²⁰⁵ Chubin, *Iran and the Persian Gulf States*, p.76. A modified GCC Security agreement was signed by all member states in December 1987, Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.81.

²⁰⁶ Twinam, *Reflections on Gulf Cooperation*, p.38.

²⁰⁷ Lawson, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.22.

²⁰⁸ Chubin, *Iran and the Persian Gulf States*, p.76.

²⁰⁹ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.100.

order to prevent their radicalization, a factor which is especially important among the impoverished Shi'a population of Bahrain,²¹⁰ as these measures “would be expected to benefit Shiites disproportionately”.²¹¹ “Just as the perceived threats to internal and external security of the GCC states impelled them to cooperate in coping with acts of terrorism and in deterring the spread of war, these threats drove them to cooperate in integrating their economies.”²¹²

While first Omani proposals for military cooperation were still rebuffed in 1981, they were soon revived as “the neighborhood grew more threatening.”²¹³ The Iranian offensives against Iraq in September 1981, and more importantly, in the spring of 1982, which led to the almost complete expulsion of Iraqi troops from Iranian soil²¹⁴ were to result in “unprecedented efforts at defense cooperation among the GCC members”²¹⁵ In combination with the Bahraini coup attempt this resulted in the first meeting of the GCC defense ministers in January 1982, laying in the words of the GCC general secretary “the first brick in the foundation [of defense cooperation] and forg[ing] the tool for the edifice that will safeguard the security and stability of the Gulf”.²¹⁶ First joint military exercises, with the participation of reluctant Kuwait, took place in 1983.²¹⁷ Throughout the duration of the Iran-Iraq war, which was to last until 1988 and which increasingly affected the GCC states, defense cooperation was to increase step by step.²¹⁸ Therefore it can be safely stated, that “the Iraq-Iran war acted as the primary catalyst for strengthening the GCC’s defense and deterrence capability.”²¹⁹

5.1.4 Summary

As we have seen in this case study of the founding years of the GCC, there is a marked general correlation between times of external and internal threats and cooperation efforts in the GCC as well as there are several examples of important policy changes of GCC states towards closer cooperation in reaction to specific threatening events.

²¹⁰ For the problematic situation of Shi'ites in Bahrain see for instance Cooper, *Power and Regionalism*, pp.114-115.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.119.

²¹² Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.96.

²¹³ Twinam, *The Gulf, Cooperation and the Council*, p.17. As he puts it, the first refusal of the Omani proposal might have been due to the fact that given the stalemate in the war between Iran and Iraq, “the GCC governments may have grown somewhat complacent about the military threat of the possible spread of that conflict”, *Ibid.*, p.13.

²¹⁴ Gause, *International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.66.

²¹⁵ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.61.

²¹⁶ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report. Middle East and North Africa*, V-82-017, 7.Jan. 1982, cited by Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 61.

²¹⁷ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.62.

²¹⁸ For an overview see Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp. 60-66.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66.

Regarding the idea that cooperation between the GCC states was to decline once the imminent threat has passed, it is difficult to establish whether this is true or not. While the lack of any substantial new efforts after the first few years and the problems with the implementation of many decided cooperation efforts seem to point in the direction of a dwindling impetus for regional integration, this could also be attributed to general start-up problems with integration in the first years of an emerging organization or to the notion that consolidation was in order after the fast efforts in the foundation period. Furthermore it is doubtful that the perceived threat for the GCC states really decreased in the decade after its foundation. The war between Iraq and Iran dragged on until 1988, and merely two years later Iraq was to occupy Kuwait, triggering another Gulf War in 1991. On the domestic scene, Iran continued to follow its idea to export its revolution until the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, after which his successors embarked upon a more conciliatory course.²²⁰

²²⁰ Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.87.

5.2 Deepening Ties in Troubled Times – The Arab Spring 2011 and the GCC

5.2.1 The Situation

As we have seen the theory of balancing behavior against external and domestic threats has a certain explanatory power for the emergence of the GCC as an organization in the early 1980s. The following chapter will now try to assess whether the same factors are still at play in the current GCC. An analysis of the most recent security threat to the Gulf regimes, posed by the so called Arab Spring of 2010/11 might help to contribute to an answer to this question. While several of the developments throughout the decade after the year 2000 certainly were worrying to the stability of the Gulf monarchies, none of them posed a life-threatening menace to the stability of the monarchical regimes. The Arab Spring, triggering the only large-scale national uprising in a Gulf state in modern history therefore was without a doubt the greatest threat to this stability in the new century and the most direct one since the occupation of Kuwait in 1991.

A short overview of what happened in the last two years might be in order and necessary to really grasp the nature of this threat. In mid-December 2010 the self-immolation of the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in the small town of Sidi Bourani, Tunisia was to break the relative calmness of the Arab world's political landscape. A small demonstration organized on the next day soon spread, and after merely two weeks Tunisia's president Ben Ali, who had ruled the country for 23 years, had to flee into exile in Saudi Arabia.²²¹ But the wave of unrest, in most cases characterized by accusations of widespread corruption, demands for a greater degree of democratic participation and economic demands, soon spread across the Tunisian borders, and in the following months almost every Arab country from Oman to Morocco experienced the emergence of protest movements, albeit the strength of these protests and their outcome varied drastically. At the end of January and by the beginning of February, a successful transition took place in Egypt, the most populous Arab country. While the transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, and - to a somewhat lesser degree -²²² in Yemen in the beginning of 2011 were successful and took place without greater bloodshed, the protests in Syria, Libya and Bahrain that started in February and March 2011 met a stronger resistance

²²¹ Riedel, Bruce O., Saudi Arabia. The Elephant in the Living Room, in: Pollack, Kenneth M., Byman, Daniel L., Al-Turk, Akram, et.al. (ed.), *The Arab Awakening. America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 2011, p. 159.

²²² For the complex situation in Yemen see Sharqieh, Ibrahim, Yemen. The Search for Stability and Development, in: Pollack, Kenneth M., Byman, Daniel L., Al-Turk, Akram, et.al. (ed.), *The Arab Awakening. America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 2011.

by the endangered regimes they tried to topple. The Libyan struggle led to a NATO intervention that put an end to the Ghaddafi regime, Syria was plunged into an ongoing unresolved civil-war and the popular movement in Bahrain in March 2011 was to be the only large-scale Arab Spring protest that was successfully put down by security forces.²²³

5.2.2 The Threat

That these events posed a danger to the Gulf monarchies is doubtless, but what was its nature? As the matter at hand is a wave of protest movements, it is manifest that the main aspect has to be seen in the field of domestic politics. The only external factors that may have come into play were the prospect of a shift in the regional power system with the potential of rising tensions between Egypt and Israel after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and the eventuality of a proliferation of the Syrian Civil war to neighboring countries, for instance into Jordan. As not even these potential disturbances would have had a direct impact on the Gulf states it becomes obvious that the idea of external threats as factors for regional integration in the GCC in the time period of the Arab Spring can be rightfully dismissed.

In contrast, the domestic threat could be seen as severe. The overthrow of autocratic rulers throughout the Arab World, even in neighboring Yemen, certainly posed a warning signal to the autocratic rulers of the Gulf, especially as unrest soon spread into the GCC itself. In addition to the large-scale protest movement in Bahrain in February/March 2011, Kuwait and Oman have experienced larger demonstrations during the last two years, while the internal situation of the other member states appeared to be calm on the surface.²²⁴ But even in Saudi Arabia calls for a “Day of Rage” in March 2011 were heard, although they never materialized in the face of enormous security measures and the resistance of the Wahhabi religious establishment.²²⁵

All in all, considering the revolutionary, partially republican,²²⁶ movement in Bahrain right at the doorstep of the other GCC states, the fear that it was inspired by Iran²²⁷ or that the mechanisms of the rentier state, that had kept Gulf societies stable in the past showed first

²²³ For a very helpful and comprehensive overview of the Arab Spring protests see the many accounts provided in Pollack, Kenneth M., Byman, Daniel L., Al-Turk, Akram, et.al. (ed.), *The Arab Awakening. America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Washington D.C., 2011.

²²⁴ Maloney, Suzanne, *Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE. The Nervous Bystanders*, in: Pollack, Kenneth M., Byman, Daniel L., Al-Turk, Akram, et.al. (ed.), *The Arab Awakening. America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 2011, pp.180-183.

²²⁵ Riedel, *Saudi Arabia*, p.160.

²²⁶ Al Jazeera, *Calls for end to Bahrain monarchy*, 2011, available at:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113924218214336.html> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²²⁷ Doran, Michael S. And Sheikh, Salman, *Bahrain, Island of Troubles*, in: Pollack, Kenneth M., Byman, Daniel L., Al-Turk, Akram, et.al. (ed.), *The Arab Awakening. America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 2011, p.188.

cracks as population groups demonstrated in the “culmination of economic, social, and political grievances”²²⁸ and the fact that several domestic problems within the GCC states resembled those that had caused Arab Spring protests in other states,²²⁹ the Arab Spring definitely constituted a major domestic threat for the monarchical regimes in the GCC states.

5.2.3 The Reaction

The security threat on the Gulf States urged Gulf leaders to take action in order to secure their regime stability and, as the following account tries to show, their reaction to this threat was to be swift, largely successful and had a serious effect on the nature of cooperation through the Gulf Cooperation Council. Before I start with these observations, two remarks regarding the problems with this case study are in order. First of all, the short temporal distance between the events of the Arab Spring and this thesis brings several problems with it: To begin with, while a lot has been written on the Arab Spring, there still is a certain lack of reliable and comprehensive secondary literature on the subject matter for which reason the inclusion of various other sources, sometimes problematic and potentially biased, is necessary. However, this evidence, mainly gained from Gulf newspapers, should be sufficient for an analysis of the general tendencies of Gulf cooperation this thesis is interested in. Secondly, as parts of the events covered in the following account are still unraveling, the delimitation of the period under consideration becomes difficult. Mainly for reasons of practicality rather than for objective reasons, this thesis will only include events up to November 2012. The second major problem with the proximity of this case study can be seen in the fact that many of the addressed events are still critical for regime survival of the GCC states, a fact that increases the usual opacity of the Gulf monarchies to even higher levels, making an analysis of the underlying factors very difficult. But regardless of these problems several interesting insights can be gained by an analysis of the reaction of the GCC to the Arab Spring movement.

Cooperation between the GCC states in the 21st century up to the Arab Spring was for the most part shaped by economic integration, but, “despite regular declarations of brotherly love at expensive summits, the GCC’s plans for further integration have been hampered for years by political tensions between the member states.”²³⁰ The threat of the Arab Spring was to change both, when it entered the Gulf area with the first demonstrations occurring in Bahrain

²²⁸ Doran, Bahrain, p.188.

²²⁹ Maloney, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the UAE, pp.180-181.

²³⁰ Kinnimont, Jane, The maybe greater GCC, in: Foreign Policy, The Middle East Channel, POMEPS Briefings, Arab Uprisings. The Saudi Counter-Revolution, August 2011, available at http://www.pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/POMEPS_BriefBooklet5_SaudiArabia_web.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012], p.35.

in February 2011. During the next weeks, according to estimations, more than 150.000 Bahrainis took to the streets,²³¹ a tremendous number in relation to the total population of the island of only about 1.2 million.²³² The demonstrators tried to emulate the events on Cairo's Tahrir Square by occupying the so called Pearl Roundabout in Manama, placed around a monument that ironically had been erected on the occasion of the 1982 GCC Summit meeting in the island state. The very same organization was soon to put an end to the Bahraini opposition movement. At the beginning of March, after violent clashes, Saudi and Emirati troops under the command of the Peninsula Shield Force entered Bahrain after a plea of the Bahraini government and helped the security forces to put down the unrest. In this successful crackdown 45 died and about 1500 were arrested.²³³ The Pearl monument was torn down in the middle of March.

This direct intervention was not the only step the GCC States undertook to contain the Arab Spring. With various measures the conservative Gulf governments tried to control the situation in their own countries and throughout the Arab world, a process that some observers dubbed the "Saudi-led Counterrevolution" to the Arab Spring,²³⁴ despite the fact that the GCC countries actually supported Arab Spring protests in various states.²³⁵ And without a doubt, when it came to their own countries, the GCC monarchies took no chances to prevent uprisings with "a mix of economic handouts, use of patronage, limited political and economic reforms as well as domestic repression".²³⁶

But one part of these measures was not domestic but transnational and partially characterized by increased activity in the framework of the GCC. In May 2011, as the organization was celebrating its 30th birthday, proposals were made by GCC leaders to strive for the inclusion

²³¹ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, available at <http://files.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf> [accessed 03.01.2013], p.88.

²³² Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, Bahrain, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html> [accessed 03.01.2013].

²³³ Colombo, Silvia, The GCC Countries and the Arab Spring. Between Outreach, Patronage and Repression, in: IAI Working Papers 12 (2012), available at <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1209.pdf> [accessed 31.12.2012], p.4.

²³⁴ Kemrava, Mehran, The Arab Spring and the Saudi-led Counterrevolution, in: *Orbis* 56, no. 1 (2012), pp.96-104.

²³⁵ Gause, Gregory, Is Saudi Arabia really counter-revolutionary? , in: Foreign Policy, The Middle East Channel, POMEPS Briefings, Arab Uprisings. The Saudi Counter-Revolution, August 2011, available at http://www.pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/POMEPS_BriefBooklet5_SaudiArabia_web.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012]. He concludes that "Saudi Arabia is against regime change in allied states [...] but that does not mean it will oppose all democratic movements.", *Ibid.*, p.9. He furthermore argues that Saudi Arabia's policy through the Arab Spring was primarily aimed at restricting Iranian influence throughout the region.

²³⁶ Colombo, The GCC Countries and the Arab Spring, p.2. For a short overview of some of the steps taken by Gulf Regimes see Ross, Michael, Will Oil drown the Arab Spring? Democracy and the Ressource Curse, in: Foreign Affairs, 2011, available at: http://www.relooney.info/SI_Milken-Arabia/0-Important_32.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012], p.3. In some cases this took the form of an outright purchase of popular support. For instance, "Kuwait offered each of its citizens a cash gift of 1000 dinars (about \$3.600) and free food staples for 14 months", *Ibid.*

of Jordan and Morocco into the organization.²³⁷ These two countries, the only two remaining Arab monarchies not yet organized in the GCC, were both under pressure from protest movements in their country and, together with the offer of membership, received considerable financial aid by the GCC states to strengthen their regime stability.²³⁸ As the inclusion of Jordan and Morocco can be seen as an attempt to not only “defend[...] the monarch in power but also their monarchical system of rule”,²³⁹ thereby retaining the legitimacy of monarchy as an acceptable form of government in the Arab world, the attempt of May 2012 to form this “coalition of the trembling”²⁴⁰ is an important piece of evidence to show the correlation between threats, the search for legitimacy, balancing behavior and the formation and development of the GCC.

But also apart from these attempts to turn the GCC into the club of all like-minded Sunni Arab monarchies, several important integration efforts have been made between the six existing GCC states during the last two years. The 32nd GCC Summit meeting in Riyadh in December 2011, already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis provided a major step in this development. It announced the so called Riyadh Declaration, stating that the GCC monarchies “are aware of the changes, challenges and threats facing the countries of the council, redrawing the situation in the region and targeting the links binding them”²⁴¹ and declaring that this “situation requires cementing ranks, unifying views and mobilizing joint energies.”²⁴² In line with these considerations the Riyadh Declaration called for the adoption of King Abdullah’s proposal “to move beyond the stage of cooperation to the stage of union”²⁴³, for limited political reform in the member states, for “the highest degrees of economic cooperation [...] and [for] overcom[ing] the obstacles that obstruct the march of achievement of the customs union, monetary union and the common market.”²⁴⁴ Furthermore it stressed the importance of an increase in diplomatic cooperation and the “development of defense and security cooperation”.²⁴⁵

²³⁷ Hamdan, Sara, Gulf Council Reaches Out to Morocco and Jordan, in: The New York Times, 2011, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/world/middleeast/26iht-M26-GCC.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed 03.01.2013].

²³⁸ Talbot, Valeria, The Gulf Monarchies in a Changing MENA region, in: ISPI Analysis (139), 2012, available at: http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/analysis_139_2012.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012], p.3.

²³⁹ Colombo, The GCC Countries and the Arab Spring, p. 10.

²⁴⁰ Political Scientist Steven Fish, as cited in Al Jazeera, The Stream. GCC courts new kingdoms, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/05/201153073955794306.html> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁴¹ Saudi Press Agency (SPA), 32nd GCC Summit Final Statement and Riyadh Declaration, available at: <http://www.arabialink.com/2011/12/21/32nd-gcc-summit-final-statement-and-riyadh-declaration/> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

The Riyadh declaration obviously forms the answer of the Gulf Cooperation Council towards the Arab Spring and shows their reaction to this domestic threat: increased cooperation. During the last two years, several concrete steps were taken by the GCC monarchs in this direction. Probably most important was the increase in internal security cooperation. A new security agreement, originally worked out in 1994 but delayed ever since, was renegotiated and signed by the six interior ministers at a meeting in Bahrain in November 2012.²⁴⁶ Under the terms of this agreement a comprehensive information exchange between the respective security services was agreed upon, together with several other far-reaching points of collaboration.²⁴⁷ Kuwait, worried that the agreement would infringe on its more developed parliamentary system and its constitution, in a surprising move decided to sign the paper despite these concerns.²⁴⁸ This can probably be seen as a reaction to a wave of large-scale demonstrations that occurred in the country in November 2012.²⁴⁹ In May 2012 the GCC leaders furthermore decided to evaluate the possibility of a joint GCC police force to be introduced in the future.²⁵⁰

In addition to this marked increase in efforts of domestic cooperation, the field of military cooperation also experienced several important developments in the past two years. The deployment of the PSF in Bahrain, its first since the less than successful operations in Kuwait in 1991 and 2003,²⁵¹ brought the military wing of the GCC back in the limelight of Gulf politics, after it had been written off by many authors during the last years.²⁵² In April 2012 PSF forces conducted a joint naval exercise under the telling title “Islands of Loyalty”, seen to be directed primarily against the Iranian occupation of three Gulf islands claimed by the

²⁴⁶ Toumi, Habib, GCC ministers sign major security agreement, in: Gulfnews.com, available at: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/gcc-ministers-sign-major-security-agreement-1.1104761> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁴⁷ For an overview see The Peninsula, Gulf Security Pact seen curbing freedom of expression, available at: <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/214662-kuwait-decides-to-ratify-gcc-security-agreement-.html> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ The demonstrations have been considered the “largest demonstrations in Kuwait’s history”, Zaaiteer, Haifa, Did Kuwait’s Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat To The Regime?, in: Al Monitor, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/10/is-kuwait-regime-really-under-threat.html> [accessed 03.01.2013]. Some of the protesters even stormed the country’s parliament, BBC News, Protesters storm Kuwaiti Parliament, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15768027> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁵⁰ Al-Jayousi, Mohammed, GCC approves security agreement, mulls Gulf Police Force, in: Al-Shorfa, available at: http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/main/2012/05/17/feature-02 [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁵¹ “The GCC command and Peninsula Shield force was so ineffective during the buildup for the first Gulf War in 1991 that the Arab commander [...] was forced to disband its elements [...] on a de facto basis”, Cordesman, National Security in Saudi Arabia, p.138.

²⁵² For an example see Legrenzi, who states that the PSF in 2006 was “finally disbanded for all intents and purposes”, Legrenzi, The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf, p.6.

UAE, and observers predict an increase of similar operations in the future.²⁵³ This goes in line with an increase of activity at GCC Defense meetings. As the Kuwaiti Defense ministry announced in a press release on the occasion of the 10th GCC Defense meeting in November 2011, “the meeting would focus on issues concerning the boosting of cooperation amongst GCC states within the strategic defense domain [...] within a delicate period on a regional level which requires more cooperation amongst Gulf states”.²⁵⁴ The Riyadh declaration endorsed these steps and called for the “Development of defense and security cooperation to ensure quickly and effectively and in a collective and unified manner confronting (sic) any danger or emergency.”²⁵⁵ Among the ideas floating around during the last two years were for instance plans for a Gulf missile defense shield directed against Iran.²⁵⁶

But it would be misleading to characterize the increase in Gulf cooperation merely in terms of security cooperation. There has also been an increase in economic and political initiatives to foster closer cooperation. In the immediate aftermath of the protests in Bahrain, the GCC in March 2011 set up a Gulf Development Program, dedicating vast sums of money to increase the living conditions of the Bahraini population.²⁵⁷ Called the “GCC Marshall Plan”²⁵⁸ by some observers, this maybe is the most blatant evidence of the above mentioned theory of Cooper and Taylor that economic cooperation between the GCC states can primarily be seen as an attempt to calm down restive population groups by providing them with economic benefits. In addition to these short-term approaches, several long term agreements were endorsed at the Riyadh Summit, for instance regarding a common GCC tariff,²⁵⁹ and various proposals for further cooperation in financial and economic affairs were made.²⁶⁰

²⁵³ Valdini, Claire, GCC to hold Naval drills in Gulf amid Iran spat, in: ArabianBusiness.com, available at: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/gcc-hold-naval-drills-in-gulf-amid-iran-spat-455277.html> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁵⁴ Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Defense Minister Sheikh Jaber partakes in GCC meeting, available at: <http://alwatandaily.kuwait.tt/ArticleDetails.aspx?Id=132491#> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁵⁵ Saudi Press Agency, 32nd GCC Summit Final Statement and Riyadh Declaration.

²⁵⁶ Garcia, Ben, GCC to set up missile defense shield, in: Kuwait Times, available at <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/2012/05/02/gcc-to-set-up-missile-shield-strong-message-to-allies-enemies/> [accessed 03.01.2012].

²⁵⁷ Al-Jayousi, Mohammed, ‘GCC Marshall Plan’ offers funding for Bahraini projects, in: Al-Shorfa, available at: http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/2012/10/11/feature-02 [accessed 31.12.2012]. Apparently a total amount of \$10 billion was provided in the immediate reaction to the revolt, Doran, Bahrain, p.192.

²⁵⁸ Al-Jayousi, ‘GCC Marshall Plan’.

²⁵⁹ Saudi Press Agency (SPA), GCC Summit Issues its Final Communiqué, available at: <http://www.alriyadh.com/en/article/693783/gcc-summit-issues-its-final-communicu> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁶⁰ Al-Monitor, Exploring the Need for a Gulf Union, available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/03/reflections-on-the-gulf-union-pr.html> [accessed 31.12.2012].

But the most important discussions within the GCC during the last year centered on the Saudi Arabian proposal of a “Gulf Union”.²⁶¹ The Riyadh declaration and the opening speech by King Abdullah marked the beginning of Saudi initiatives in this direction and they were repeated occasionally during 2012.²⁶² Such a closer union would probably have the European Union as its main model with full political and economic integration as its goal and would result in a slow erosion of the sovereignty of the GCC member states, which explains the negative attitude of several smaller member states towards these proposals.²⁶³ In fact, the only member state to fully endorse the Saudi plans is Bahrain, which might well be the result of the most immediate threat to the Bahraini regime.²⁶⁴ In fact the other GCC states have often been skeptical regarding Saudi proposals for closer cooperation since the Arab Spring and apparently have also prevented the inclusion of Jordan and Morocco into the organization.²⁶⁵ Which of the two tendencies will prevail and to what extent the proponents of a union will be able to overcome fears of resulting Saudi domination in the smaller member states can probably be more precisely assessed in the aftermath of the 33rd GCC Summit meeting, which is to take place in Bahrain in late December 2012.

5.2.4 Summary

As this chapter has shown, the Arab Spring protests and the resulting domestic pressure on the monarchical regimes of the GCC have resulted in several important initiatives for increased integration between its member states. While it should be noted that already the years after 2000 had seen several important steps in this direction, most importantly in the economic sector, the Arab Spring definitely has given these attempts a new quality and a new dynamic.

Therefore a positive correlation between times of a high level of threat, in this case a primarily domestic threat, and times of increased cooperation between the Gulf monarchies with effects on the GCC, primarily in the field of security cooperation, can again be observed.

²⁶¹ Al Monitor, Exploring the Need for a Gulf Union.

²⁶² Fahim, Kareem and Kirkpatrick, David D., Saudi Arabia seeks Union of Monarchies in Region, in: New York Times, 2012, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/15/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-seeks-union-of-monarchies-in-region.html?_r=0 [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁶³ For these prospects see Salisbury, Peter, Chasing the impossible dream?, in: The Gulf, 2012, available at: <http://www.thegulfonline.com/Articles.aspx?ArtID=4294> [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁶⁴ BBC News, Arab Gulf States delay union decision, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18057836> [accessed 31.12.2012]. There even exist plans for a union just between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Zambelis, Chris, Proposed Saudi Arabia-Bahrain Union Reflects Intensifying Persian Gulf Rivalry, in: Terrorism Monitor 10(12), pp.7-8, available at: http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM_010_Issue12_02.pdf [accessed 31.12.2012].

²⁶⁵ Shiloh, Nachum, Jordan and Morocco will not join GCC. A case study for GCC's Dynamics, available at <http://gmi.sitestudio.co.il/jordan-and-morocco-will-not-join-gcc.aspx> [accessed 03.01.2013].

This can clearly be seen as an attempt of the GCC states to enhance both their security and their legitimacy, and as attempts to balance against the source of the threat, which, like in 1979, was perceived by the GCC members to be stemming from Iran and Shi'a groups in the case of the Bahraini uprisings.²⁶⁶

Regarding the opposite notion of decreasing integration once the threat declines, the answer is difficult again, primarily due to the short temporal distance. It is furthermore unclear whether the level of domestic threat has actually declined. While the Syrian struggle is still ongoing and many former Arab Spring countries are still characterized by power struggles and an unclear situation, the Arab Spring has not inspired any new and successful large-scale demonstrations in the Arab world for over a year, and therefore can for the most part be seen as a thing of the past and a declining source of threat for the GCC monarchies. Nevertheless, the recent demonstrations in Kuwait may well serve as a reminder for Gulf rulers that the threat is far from gone.

Therefore, it is impossible to assess with certainty whether the critical stance adopted by several smaller Gulf states towards the Saudi proposals of a Gulf Union and the inclusion of Jordan and Morocco into the organization, can be seen as an effect of the declining level of threat.

²⁶⁶ Doran, Bahrain, pp.191-192.

6. Conclusion

The intention of this thesis was to find and to examine driving factors for the development of regional integration between the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, which constitute the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the most evolved regional cooperation organization in the Arab world. Given the nature of the involved regimes and the unstable structure of the Middle East, neorealism seemed to be the most valuable and most fitting theory of International Relations for an analysis of this question. Within the broad stream of neorealist thought, this thesis has focused on neorealist alliance theories and especially on the idea of balancing against threats as explanatory factors for the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council. These theories mainly see international and domestic threats as the drivers of regional integration and without a doubt have a high degree of plausibility and explanatory power for the emergence of GCC. In order to get a better understanding of the connection between threats and the emergence and development of this organization, two case studies followed the theoretical considerations, analyzing the emergence of the GCC in the early 1980s and the development of the organization in reaction to the Arab Spring 2010/11.

As these case studies have shown, there is indeed a marked correlation between times of an externally and domestically threatening setting and times of increased cooperation within the GCC. Furthermore various concrete examples have shown how in some cases direct threats to the stability and legitimacy of a Gulf regime have convinced it to adopt a more positive stance towards integration projects in the GCC. In both of the examined time periods a balancing behavior of the Gulf monarchies could be observed as they tried to gain strength, security and increased legitimacy through closer cooperation with each other, caused by the supranational nature of the threat and the general notion, that a threat to one of the monarchies constituted a threat to all of them. This indicates that balance-of-threat theories are indeed well suited to explain cooperation in the Gulf region.

Whether the opposite claim that integration would be abandoned by the member states once the immediate threat has passed holds true is difficult to establish given the evidence from this thesis. While certain tendencies in this direction could undoubtedly be identified, given the nature of the case studies and the constantly threatening nature of the international system in the Middle East, no clear picture could emerge.

The same thing can be said regarding the question whether internal or external factors contributed more prominently to the development of the GCC. Given the evidence from the observed case studies and the achievements of the GCC in internal security cooperation, a certain tendency towards the prevalence of internal factors seems to emerge, as it was also

observed by Ramazani.²⁶⁷ It should however be noted, that this tendency could well be connected to the selection of case studies, rather than to an actual trend, as the most pronounced external threat to the GCC, the occupation of Kuwait by Iraqi troops in the summer of 1990 and the resulting developments were not included in this thesis.²⁶⁸ Maybe a more comprehensive picture about the factors for the development of the GCC could be gained by a closer examination of a wider array of different time periods.

Another problematic factor can be seen in the fact that this thesis in both cases has concentrated merely on the most obvious source of threat, in both cases been seen by the GCC states as originating from Iran and from Iranian-backed Shi'a groups in the Gulf states,²⁶⁹ and not on secondary threats. But these various other factors certainly also had an effect on the actions of Gulf rulers and the cooperation of the Gulf states and their inclusion in the analysis may well lead to a more complete picture of the mechanisms that link threats and cooperation or even to slightly different results.

But despite these shortfalls, inherent in the limited framework of a thesis like this, it can nevertheless be stated that the important role of domestic and external threats as the driving forces behind the regional integration of the Arab Gulf states has been shown. Or, to express it in the drastic terms of R.K. Ramazani, there is ample evidence for the assumption that the GCC was born and developed out of the realization of Gulf leaders that "if they did not hang together, they would hang separately."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 10. It has been suggested that even the few steps towards military integration should be seen in the light of domestic politics, as the PSF is merely a force against internal threats to support Gulf regimes in the case of a revolutionary movement, Holthaus, *Regimelegitimität und regionale Kooperation*, p.76. The PSF intervention in Bahrain seems to reinforce this point of view. However Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, pp.75-76 at least partially attributes the prevalence of domestic security cooperation to the realization by Gulf leaders that all military integration is ultimately of no avail given the inherent weakness of the Gulf monarchies towards their regional rivals and the resulting dependancy of their security on the United States. It could also simply be related to the fact that internal security threats are generally more dangerous in the Gulf security arena than external threats, as "[t]he most important and distinctive factor in the Gulf regional security complex is not power imbalances but the salience of transnational identities.", Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.9.

²⁶⁸ For a very short overview of the correlation between the external threats and GCC cooperation in this time period see Lawson, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, pp.24-26.

²⁶⁹ Doran, *Bahrain*, pp.191-192.

²⁷⁰ Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council*, p.11.

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