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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

Edited by  
Prof. Alpaslan Özerdem

# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security



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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### ARTICLES

7

**The Interaction Between Pakistan and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council: 'Sub-Imperialism by Complementarity'?**

By Bruno De Cordier

31

**'Order' and 'Justice' in World Politics: A Retrospective Analysis of the Gulf Crisis (1990-1) and the War in Iraq (2003) from Hedley Bull's Perspective**

By Nur Cetinoglu Harunoglu

53

**Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Building Resilient Communities or Unsafe Conditions?**

By Joram Tarusarira and Bernard Manyena

### FIELD REPORT

75

**Conflict Prevention Strategies in Northern Ghana: A Case Study of the Ethnic Conflicts in Kpemale**

By Albert Yelyang

### BOOK REVIEWS

96

Karina V. Korostelina

**History Education in the Formation of Social Identity: Toward a Culture of Peace**

By Marie Nissanka

99

Louise Shelley

**Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective**

By Lauren Brown

104

Chuck Thiessen

**Local Ownership of Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Shouldering Responsibility for Sustainable Peace and Development**

By Andrew Collins

107

Thomas Matyók, Maureen Flaherty, Hamdesa Tusó, Jessica Senehi and Sean Byrne (eds.)

**Peace on Earth: The Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict Studies**

By Steven Leach

110

Hakan Yılmaz and Çağla E. Aykaç (Eds.)

**Perceptions of Islam in Europe: Culture, Identity and Muslim 'Other'**

By Nikos Christofis

114

Gabrielle Rifkind and Giandomenico Picco

**The Fog of Peace: The Human Face of Conflict Resolution**

By Sian Nicholas

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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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**The Interaction Between Pakistan and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council: 'Sub-Imperialism by Complementarity'?**

By Bruno De Cordier\*

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## Abstract

The multi-faceted and often non-institutionalised cooperation and interaction between Pakistan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, in which much revolves around Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia, is not merely geopolitical (military) and formal (economic); it also has a strong grassroots dimension through labour migration, the remittance economy, and pilgrimage. This paper examines whether the interaction between Saudi Arabia and the other high-income oil-exporting GCC economies on the one hand, and lower-middle income and more agricultural Pakistan on the other, constitutes a case of sub-imperialism. Although several of the characteristics and dynamics of sub-imperialism are indeed present, Pakistan is not completely peripheral. The interaction between Pakistan and the GCC is ultimately situated at the nexus of Saudi Arabia's pan-Islamic diplomacy, the interests of the respective nation-states, an urge towards economic diversification within the GCC bloc, and the creation and effect of the hubs in the region.

**Key words:** Pakistan, Gulf Cooperation Council, sub-imperialism, Arab FDI, non-OECD aid, labour migration, pilgrimage economy, military cooperation.



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# The Interaction Between Pakistan and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council: 'Sub-Imperialism by Complementarity'?

## Introduction and Framework

This article examines the nature of the ties, and the different levels and vectors of interaction, between Pakistan and the states, economies, and societies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC<sup>1</sup>)<sup>2</sup>. While the member states of the GCC were all established as modern nation states between 1927 and 1971, and their political regimes are all hereditary autocracies, their interaction with, and their economic and ideological ties to, the territories that became the state of Pakistan extend far back into the pre-modern era and predate the foundation of Pakistan which was established on a republican model in 1947. Sea traffic and coastal trade between the Makran coast, Oman, and the Gulf, for example, have existed in some form or another for centuries.<sup>3</sup> The Makran coast, Multan, and Sindh were integrated into the eastern frontier of the Islamic sphere under the control of the Umayyad caliphs by the year 713, and this integration, as well as implanting Islam on the subcontinent, inserted a common ideological element into the different social and ideological identities that emerged beyond this point, an element that has persisted to the present day (Wink 2002). This article seeks to establish whether the ties and interactions between Pakistan and the GCC countries – which are, as we briefly noted, grafted in an old pattern – form an example of so-called 'sub-imperialism'.

The idea that such a sub-imperialist relationship might exist is relevant in the light of the notion that a multipolar world order is emerging or might soon emerge; it arose in relation to a reading of Matthew Flynn's case-based examination of sub-imperialism (Flynn 2007). Flynn's article revisits Mauro Marini's 1972 theory of sub-imperialism, and focuses, as Marini himself did, on Brazil; yet, despite the entirely different regional context, it contains a fair number of useful elements and insights for the overall framework of examination here. Marini considers sub-imperialism to be a power relation and dynamic in which certain countries and economies do not passively accept and undergo the real or perceived dominance of the traditional Triad centres – the US and, by extension, North America; north-western Europe; and Japan – which together form the core of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) bloc. Instead, non-Triad countries actively participate in establishing that dominance by reaffirming and advancing global institutional power structures in their own peripheries or semi-peripheries. In short, despite often paying lip service to 'anti-imperialism', they function as extensions and sub-contractors of existing structural dominance, rather than as states that offer opposition or alternatives to it (See also Bond 2013).



This being said, sub-imperialism can also be understood as a process in which non-Triad countries and economies, often semi-peripheries themselves, actively expand and consolidate peripheries of their own, albeit at a different geographic scale, at the regional or sub-regional sublevel: their activities constitute 'sub-imperialism' because they are limited to a specific, common, cultural space. These processes may often be driven by one or more factors including a state's growing economic potential, new political vision, or the apparent void created by the contracting influence and legitimacy of the Triad centres. Flynn and Marini establish different conditions under which a sub-imperialist scheme can function (Flynn 2007, pp. 11-13). First, there is what Marini called 'industrialized dependency', which, he argued, results from an international division of labour in which the advanced economy specialises in high-tech industry while delegating intermediate and traditional production to other peripheral or semi-peripheral countries. Second, the super-exploitation of what he, perhaps anachronistically, calls 'the working class' means that production becomes disconnected from consumption: capital is attracted to developing countries because of the presence of a large labour reserve which makes wage repression possible. Third, the sub-imperialist entity has an assertive, if not interventionist, foreign policy, either bilaterally, through multilateral channels, or most often through a combination of these. Finally, there is the active participation of elites – historically rooted and based in national states – in what is called the 'transnational state', a non-centralised state which consists of informal and formal elite networks, transnational corporations, and international organisations, that has gradually become a framework for capital accumulation. The analytical framework established thus far will now be applied to a discussion of the different levels and sectors of interaction between Pakistan and the GCC bloc in order to see whether their relationships constitute an example of sub-imperialism.

The only common institutionalised intergovernmental cooperation frameworks that encompass both Pakistan and all of the GCC countries, apart from the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, are defined by common ideology and faith: the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, its different subsidiaries, and the Islamic Development Bank, are, furthermore, all organisations in which Saudi Arabia plays a leading role. Indeed, much of Pakistan's interaction with the Persian-Arabian Gulf revolves around its multidimensional ties with Saudi Arabia, the GCC's core state. Pakistan has the peculiarity of being one of the few modern national states defined and founded specifically for a religiously-defined community, South Asia's Muslim population. The state of Saudi Arabia – the GCC's largest member in geographic, demographic, and economic terms – is crystallized around a tribal monarchy from Nejd and it has, since it was founded, been the self-declared guardian and de facto owner of Mecca and Medina, the Muslim Ummah's sacred centres. The latter is not an unimportant factor since Pakistan, thanks to the size of its population and its religious geography, reflects the reality that the demographic centre of gravity for the Islamic world and the Ummah has long since shifted eastwards from the Arab sphere (The Pew Research Centre 2012, p. 21).

The GCC's economies are high-income and are highly integrated into the economic world system. That integration is ensured both by the lucrative extractive sector and, over the last



fifteen years, the global hub cities and special economic zones that have either been sprouting in the region (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Manama) or are being planned or built (Saudi Arabia's special economic cities near Jeddah, Medina, and Jizan, and within Hail). Instead of relying on a classic strategy of industrial dominance, these states have invested capital from the extractive sector in economic diversification both abroad and in their domestic markets. The demand for cheap imported labour that this spending engenders is not disconnected from consumption though, since the remittance economy does feed consumption in the countries of origin of the labour migrants. The financial-economic ties and political interaction between the GCC economies and Pakistan are also supported and informed by both informal and formal transnational elite networks. Yet, when one takes a closer look at the levels and dimensions of an interaction which may well constitute a sub-imperialist relationship, one notices that they go well beyond elite networks and abstract diplomatic ties: they also affect and involve the grassroots of those sectors. Against this background, we will now discuss the following five key dimensions more closely: defence and securitisation; trade and investment; labour migration and the remittance economy; ideology and more specifically religious dynamics; and development- and humanitarian-based aid.

### The Defence Symbiosis

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a tradition of close military cooperation. The official figures for Pakistan's armed forces in 2013 suggest that they have the strength of some 947,800 personnel, while the country spent 2.7 percent of its GDP on defence and has military nuclear capacity. During the same year, Saudi Arabia's armed forces comprised 248,000 personnel while the country's defence spending constituted 8.9 percent of its GDP.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan – a state the backbone of which is its military – has been providing military aid to Saudi Arabia for decades, starting with assistance in training its air force in 1961, and the provision of air raid support against an incursion by what was then socialist South Yemen in 1969 (See Quandt 1981, pp. 39-41). Since that time, varying numbers of Pakistani military personnel have been stationed, in one capacity or another, in Saudi Arabia (See Fair 2014, pp. 83-4). During the First Gulf War (1990-1) which followed the occupation of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Pakistan sent military units to protect Mecca and Medina, and Saudi Arabia has also been providing various forms of support to Pakistan's nuclear programme since 1979. Saudi Arabia also gave favourable oil supplies and loans to help Pakistan cope with the economic consequences of its nuclear test in 1998.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, in much of its military cooperation with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia has used its capacity as the guardian of the sacred sites of Islam to mobilise support for containing the influence of both socialist and Shia movements and regimes in the Arab-Islamic world. Since late 2001, much of the cooperation in this field has been framed in the context of 'fighting international terrorism' although the use of this politicised discourse often generates the need to manage internal dissent in Saudi Arabia and in other GCC states. Recent developments that will have a profound impact on the security paradigms of both the Gulf monarchies and Pakistan are the emergence of Daesh (داعش), the Arabic acronym of the Islamic State, ISIS or ISIL), and, latterly, the declaration of allegiance and support for Daesh by



the Taliban movement of Pakistan, some smaller Takfiri Sunni groups in the country, and dissident al-Qaeda factions on the Arab peninsula.<sup>6</sup> Despite alleged ties between Daesh and at least some interest groups and informal financial networks in Saudi Arabia and Qatar,<sup>7</sup> Daesh and its affiliates could, sooner or later, target both what they see as the apostate and illegitimate rulers of Pakistan and the GCC countries, as well as the Shia minorities there. A possible collapse, fragmentation, and subsequent dispersal of Daesh will also confront Pakistan and several GCC states with a fluid militant network that could generate yet another de facto tie between their militant fringes across state boundaries.

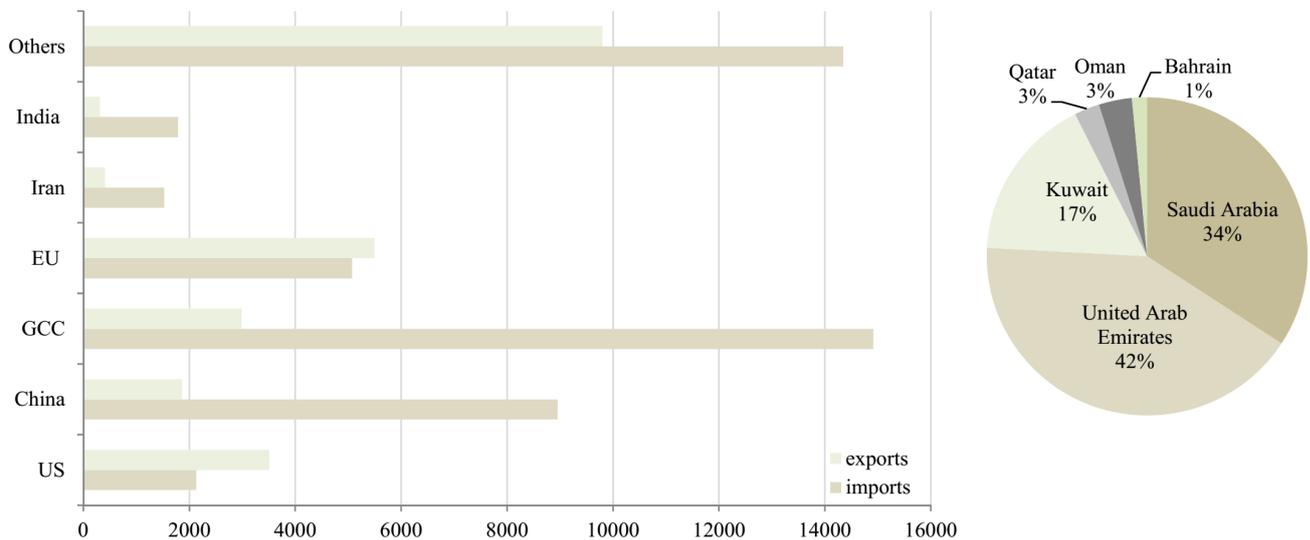
The military connections between Pakistan and the GCC countries have a sizeable economic dimension. Business activities in various sectors – agro-industry, banking, transport and communications, and energy – that are related to, or initiated by, groups and individuals from Pakistan's defence sector allegedly account for approximately twenty-five percent of the country's gross domestic product. Companies embedded in networks of military or former military personnel are also active in the trade between Pakistan and the GCC sphere.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, along with several other GCC states' military sectors, have traditionally been major Anglo-American military clients in terms of arms and equipment purchases as well as aid. Just as the elites of the GCC states consider external military protection and suppliers crucial to their survival, the US considers all of these states to be crucial to its security strategy because of the role they have played in containing socialism (especially in the 1988-91 period), terrorism, and the emerging powers (1997-2001). It also recognises their strategic importance in relation to energy policy in the Arab and wider Islamic worlds: four GCC countries are OPEC members, and Saudi Arabia is vital in the petrodollar system.<sup>9</sup>

Pakistan, both as a state and a society – and especially, though not exclusively, its sizeable Shia component – is not as hostile to Iran as are Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, with the exception of Oman. This may explain why, in spring 2015, Islamabad turned down a request by Saudi Arabia to send Pakistani troops to Yemen to assist with its military intervention against the Houthi-Shia uprising there. Instead, the Pakistani authorities opted for the evacuation of 980 of its citizens who were living as expatriates in that country. It also chose to adopt a neutral stance and officially preferred to participate in mediation through multilateral channels like the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The strongest reaction against Islamabad's stance came from the United Arab Emirates. Its importance as a Gulf trading partner with, and aid provider to, Pakistan has been increasing steadily over the last couple of years. Recent polls by the Gilani Research Foundation and by the Institute for Public Opinion Research suggest that between forty-seven and sixty-seven percent of those Pakistani respondents who are aware of the situation in Yemen would support the Pakistani military presence there.<sup>10</sup> These responses raise questions as to what extent such reserves can be repeated or maintained.

### **Oil, Land, and Free-Trade Agreements**

Since 1973, the privileged military ties between the US and Saudi Arabia and other GCC oil exporters have formed a core component of the petrodollar system, a system which also

determines the modalities of the energy trade between the GCC sphere and Pakistan. This brings us to the second level of interaction, embodied in the international trade and investment streams between the GCC economies and Pakistan. In 2011, total Pakistan-GCC trade officially stood at some \$18 billion. Of this amount, some \$15 billion was made up of imports from the GCC countries, as against three billion dollars' worth of exports to the same states. A glance at Figure 1 below reveals that, in terms of imports, the GCC countries as an economic bloc perform as by far Pakistan's largest single trade partner in the reference year. The near-totality of Pakistan's trade with the GCC bloc is, in decreasing order, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. As one can rather easily guess, this is largely because Pakistan's energy sector depends on petroleum imports from the GCC states and from these three oil-exporting countries in particular.



Pakistan has been trying over the years to diminish its dependency on GCC oil by a number of means. Strategies have included the partial reorientation of its energy supplies towards natural gas; planning to introduce gas imports by pipeline from Iran by 2015; prospecting and developing its domestic natural gas reserves in Sui and Makran as well as its coal and oil fields in the Thar desert; and upgrading the new port in Gwadar for the planned import of natural gas and coal from other regions. In terms of exports, Pakistan's exports to the GCC countries consist of agro-industrial products, food, and textiles. Its main export markets are elsewhere, in the EU, the US, and a plethora of other individual economies, and they are primarily related to its main exports which are raw cotton, sugar cane, and other agro-industrial commodities. The GCC bloc, as a portion of Pakistan's export market, has been slightly shrinking over the last few years, and, as Figure 1 shows, this results in a highly unequal trade balance.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the GCC bloc into Pakistan comes predominantly from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait. Over the last one and a half decades, groups and companies from the GCC bloc have benefited from the shift towards privatisation in the

telecommunications and finance sectors; they have also invested in real estate, oil infrastructure, transport, and the steel industry. The latter is, in fact, a sector in which the family of Pakistan's current prime minister has assets and interests (Nawaz Sharif was in exile in Saudi Arabia between late 2000 and 2007). With 3.88 billion dollars' worth of foreign direct investment (FDI) during the 2000-14 period, the UAE even became the largest individual FDI source after the US which contributed \$5.7 billion; meanwhile \$776.5 million was provided by Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup> FDI and capital transfer do not create a one-way dynamic from the high-GDP GCC economies to lower middle-GDP Pakistan though. The UAE and Bahrain, in particular, attract substantial investment from Pakistani businesses and individuals who often have connections to the political elite. In 2013, for instance, 6,000 Pakistani companies in a variety of sectors like software and IT, electronics, logistics, real estate, agro-industry, and banking were operating in Dubai, or using the latter as a hub for their activities on the wider GCC market (Pravakar, Geethanjali and Dash 2014, p. 128).

In 2013 and 2014, Pakistani citizens and companies reportedly purchased the equivalent of 4.35 billion dollars' worth of real estate in Dubai, and constituted eight percent of the client base for the city-state's real estate market during that period (Khan, 2015a, 2015b). For the elite groups involved, this is not only an investment, but a way to secure capital, and capital investments, in case of political change in Pakistan itself. Since 2002, and especially since the global food commodity price spikes of 2008, an increasing interest and activity can be observed in FDI from the GCC towards the agro-industrial sector (especially the dairy and fruit branches, fisheries, and livestock) and related infrastructure (Woertz *et al.* 2008, pp. 6-7). This fits into a trend in which it is expected to see food imports into the GCC double from \$27.5 to \$53.1 billion between 2011 and 2020. These imports already cover ninety percent of the region's needs, and their expansion reflects a bid to enhance a food security strategy for the GCC which involves not just Pakistan but also some African countries which are geographically close and with which historical and cultural ties exist (Economist Intelligence Unit 2010, p. 16).

GCC actors are confronted in this field with similar interests from Chinese, Southeast Asian, and European corporations and investment consortiums. While this certainly boosts the agro-industrial sector, the ensuing competition for access to land also steadily exacerbates social tensions and faultlines in a country where forty-three percent of the labour force is made up of people in agricultural employment: in reality, land grabs bear out the popular view that they mainly benefit the neo-feudal landowner elites in Pakistan to the detriment of family-based agriculture and fisheries. Since 2006, the GCC has sought to push through a free trade agreement with Pakistan. Such an agreement would, theoretically, boost the trade volume between Pakistan and the GCC countries up to \$350 billion by 2020. The actual agenda, however, is perceived to be driven by the interests of Qatar in particular. The state is itself one of the world's major exporters of natural gas, and is therefore deeply concerned by Pakistan's intention to import gas from Iran. A free trade agreement would deepen Pakistan's energy dependency on the GCC beyond the oil sector.

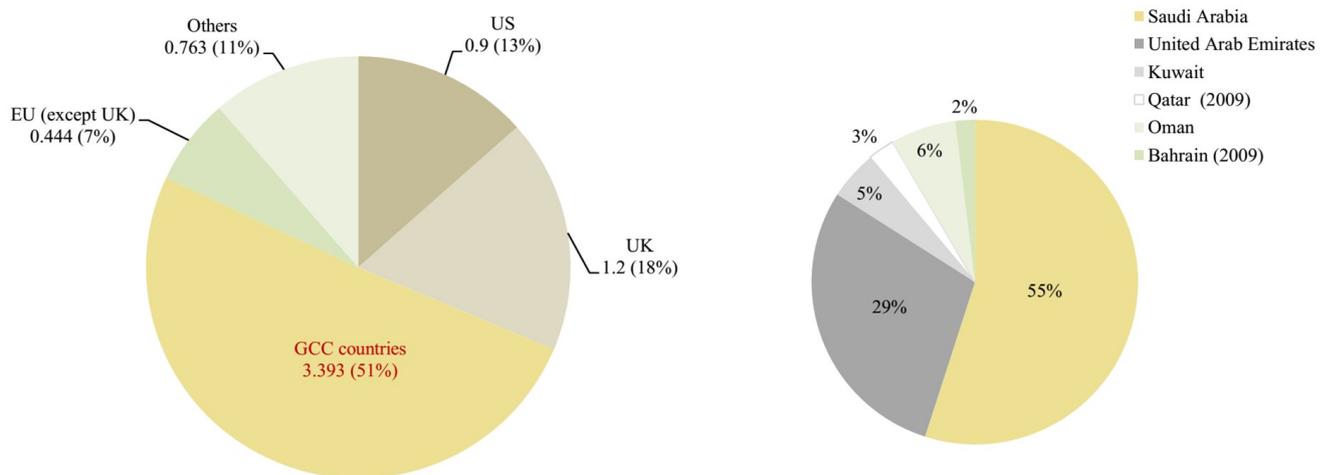
A final factor to consider here is that members of the Pakistani political and business elites have invested in real estate and the service industries within the Persian-Arab Gulf's hub



cities and so-called economic free zones; they also possess bank accounts in Bahrain which serves as a tax haven for the wealthy. The Bahrain uprising in early 2011 was suppressed – at least for the time being – for a number of reasons, and Iran’s perceived role in events within the Sunni-ruled, Shia-majority kingdom were a factor. This financial investment helps to explain why the suppression was aided by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other outside actors, including Pakistan. Pakistan’s involvement did not take the form of open and direct military intervention, as did that of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Instead, it occurred through the recruitment of up to 2,000 Pakistani personnel and advisors for Bahrain’s national guard and riot police by so-called private security contractors from the wider business realm connected to Pakistan’s military. Many of the recruits were allegedly retired military and police personnel from the Makran region (Mashal 2011).

### The Fibre of the Remittance Economy

Military recruits form a small minority within what is an enormous volume of labour migration between Pakistan and the GCC bloc. As we can clearly see from Figure 2 here, the GCC countries – and Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular – form by far the largest destination for Pakistani labour migrants and expatriates in the world. In 2012, nearly 3.4 million Pakistani migrants, mainly men, lived and worked at least seasonally in the GCC countries. At first glance, this seems easy to explain in terms of the stark demographic and economic imbalances between Pakistan and the GCC bloc. In 2012, the GCC sphere had a total population of 43.3 million and Saudi Arabia accounted for nearly two-thirds of that figure, whereas the population of Pakistan was 175.3 million or over four times the GCCs’ population. While the GDP per capita was \$2,792 in Pakistan in that year, it amounted to an average of \$44,987 in the GCC sphere (Islamic Development Bank 2012). Such discrepancies, however, provide insufficient explanation for the migration patterns that emerged.



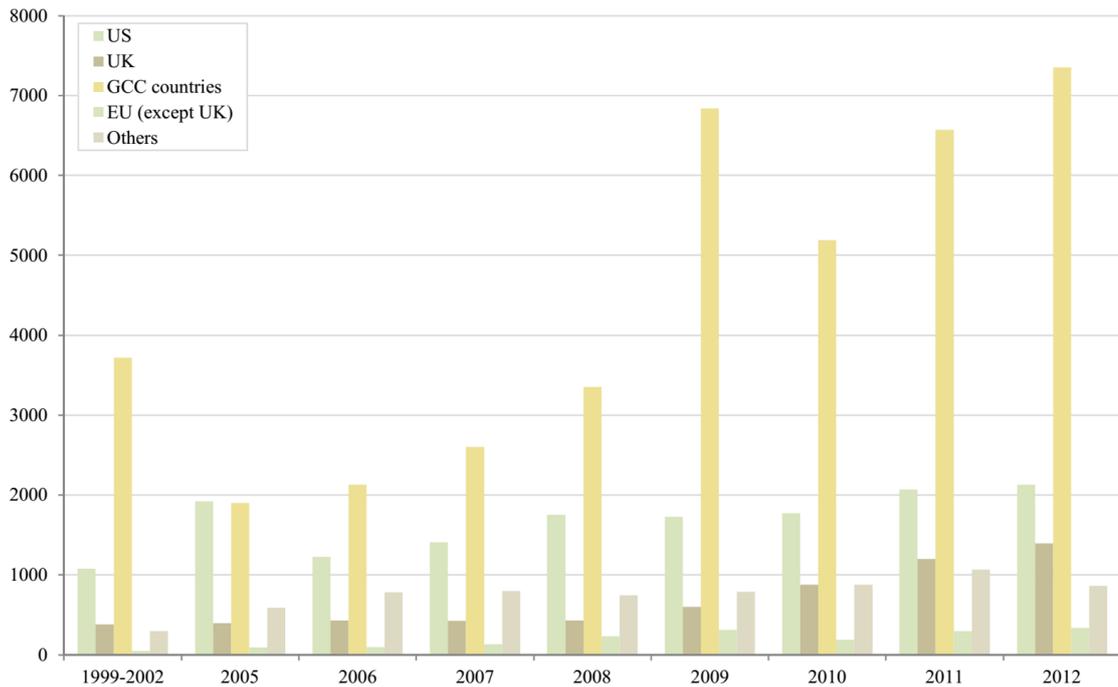
As was noted earlier, trade, transport, and migration ties between southern Pakistan and the GCC countries – and with Oman in particular – have existed for centuries, and several population groups in Oman and Saudi Arabia claim ancestry from regions that are now in



Pakistan. Networks and niche presences that were later activated in modern labour migration clearly did already exist; however, it was not until 1980 that sizeable migration and expatriation from Pakistan to the GCC area occurred. The oil boom of 1971-3 initially attracted labour migrants from Arab countries which were not members of the GCC. After 1980, growing labour demand, a native GCC population that is culturally less inclined to engage in the specific work needed, and a Pakistani foreign policy that increasingly leaned towards the Persian-Arab Gulf all culminated in a second immigration wave in which Pakistani workers were prominent.<sup>12</sup> Another landmark event in this process came after the First Gulf War (1990-1) when Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries decided to turn eastward to Pakistan and other countries for new labour to replace those Palestinians and other Arabs who had been generally supportive of Iraq (then still under Saddam's Baathist rule) and were now perceived to pose a security threat (Lavergne 2003).

Between 1997 and 2001, the decision by several GCC governments to diversify and modernise their oil- and trade-based economies, coupled with high oil prices, led to a rapid surge in development activity, a 259 percent regional GDP growth between 1998 and 2008, as well as a peak in labour demand. The proportion of labour migrants of all nationalities in the GCC's active population came to range from over thirty percent in Saudi Arabia to over ninety percent in the UAE and Qatar. Pakistani migrants in the GCC area are primarily employed in construction. Pakistani labour has in no small part built the GCC region's modern metropolises, its mirage-like skylines, and the infrastructure and developments established in Dubai and Abu Dhabi by members of international elites. Other sectors in which Pakistanis are well-represented include maintenance work, small and medium trade, as well as the taxi industry, and other transport activities. Thanks to these links, the GCC economies form by far the largest source for remittances to Pakistan, followed far behind by the continental European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK).

In 2012, \$13.18 billion in remittances – five to seven percent of the country's GDP – was sent to Pakistan from a variety of economies and regions. Of this amount, as Figure 3 shows, some \$7.35 billion came from the GCC economies, with forty-six percent from Saudi Arabia, thirty-six percent from the UAE (more specifically, eighteen percent from Dubai, and seventeen percent from Abu Dhabi), seven percent from Kuwait, and eleven percent from the three other GCC states (State Bank of Pakistan - Statistics Department 2015). The remittance economy has created a substantial network of both official and informal financial transfer channels and services between the GCC countries and Pakistan (Piolet 2009). The official number of expatriate countrymen in the region forms only about two percent of the overall population of Pakistan, yet their remittances to the country form an important financial lifeline for communities at the grassroots level in their places of origin, much more so than international aid does. As is the case in other reception societies, the impact of remittance flows is complex and strongly related to the social psychology of the individuals and communities involved. These funds are certainly productively invested and help to alleviate poverty, but they can also contribute to handout dependency, consumerist mirages, deindustrialization, and agricultural decline (Qayyum *et al.* 2008, pp. 103-18). The remittances from GCC countries and other states have been of considerable use in helping to



combat the economic setbacks brought about by the earthquake in north-western Pakistan in late 2005, the military offensive in Swat in spring 2009, and the floods in summer 2010.<sup>13</sup>

### The Political Economy of Hearts and Minds

A channel of interaction and an economic tie that is specifically embedded in the religious geography that is shared between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Ummah in general, is what one could call the pilgrimage industry that brings visitors to Mecca and Medina. The number of pilgrims, or at least pilgrimage-related entries, between 2000 and 2012 is estimated at more than thirty million, and more than two-thirds of these came from outside Saudi Arabia. The economic and psychological dimensions of this influx are hardly negligible. Saudi Arabia's direct and indirect annual revenue from organising and hosting the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages (derived from permits and taxes, transport, accommodation, food, etc.) is estimated to be between \$10 and \$30 billion depending on the year and the source. Pilgrimage revenue is the country's second-largest source of income after the hydrocarbon industry. Official figures show that Pakistan took in 11.7 percent of the foreigners who performed the Hajj in 2012, and was the second-largest source of pilgrims to Mecca and Medina after Egypt which benefited from 14.9 percent of this traffic.<sup>14</sup> According to the official Hajj statistics, Pakistan had also occupied second place the year before, and had a prominent place in the years before that (Government Department of Statistics 2012, 2015).

These religious ties bring up the controversial issue of Saudi Arabia's, Kuwait's, and Qatar's 'ideological exports' to Pakistan through private foundations and quasi-governmental structures and their role in the growth there of Wahhabi and especially Salafi Sunni societal segments.<sup>15</sup> In Pakistan, as elsewhere, social identities traditionally dominated by more

syncretic Sufi beliefs and practices have come under pressure because of the impact of globalisation, social mobility, migration, and urbanisation. The discrediting of members of the Sufi elites that arose from their close association with unpopular parts of the political elites has also had an impact, and has helped to create space in certain sectors of Pakistani society for more orthodox and puritanical interpretations and practices of Islam. One of these interpretations is Salafism which is now adhered to by, or influences, an estimated five to seven percent of the country's followers of Islam.

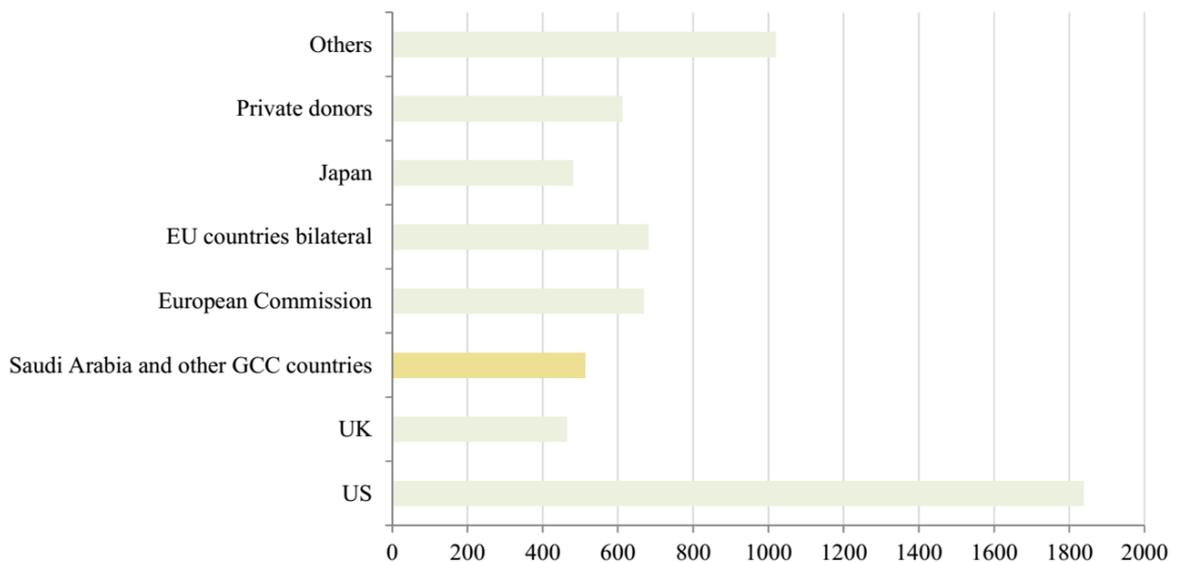
Since 1978, Saudi Arabia, in particular, either through official channels or through an array of private charities, has been funding the construction of mosques – including the enormous landmark Faisal mosque in the capital Islamabad – and various forms of religious education as well as some religious movements and political parties. These parties include the Salafi Ahl al-Hadith (أهل الحديث, 'People of the tradition of the Prophet') movement and its political wing. These ties are not recent and can be traced back to 1927 when Ahl al-Hadith representatives from what is now Pakistan travelled to the Kingdom of Nejd and Hejaz, the predecessor state of Saudi Arabia. More structural support from Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, Kuwait, was provided for the Ahl al-Hadith and similar political-religious organisations in Pakistan after the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, and this trend accelerated after Pakistan's foreign policy turn towards the Persian-Arab Gulf after 1980 (Siddiqi 2013, Sikand 2007). Nowadays, the Ahl al-Hadith runs or controls seventeen social and political organisations and an estimated 400 Quranic schools in the country. This is some four percent of the registered total, but, when the growth from forty-seven Quranic schools affiliated to the movement in 1971 to 161 in 1988 is noted, it is clear that this is a niche which is expanding over time (Siddique 2009). The country's audiences can also capture religious satellite channels from the Persian-Arab Gulf, some of which broadcast Salafi and Wahhabi content. In general, Salafism is more prevalent in urban centres and those parts of the country which are relatively more affluent because, among other reasons, of a strong remittance influx from the GCC region. Although the Salafi Ahl al-Hadith movement is not involved in armed struggles, the existence of militant groups inspired by Salafism, and the fact that these groups consider Sufis and the large Shia minority to be heretics, means that their presence is perceived to be a societal threat by various opinion leaders and competing Islamic groups and leaders.

Labour migration and religious interaction through pilgrimage ensure that the GCC region has a presence – and Saudi Arabia in particular has an impact – on the mental map in Pakistan. Despite the often harsh and exploitative working conditions and the social segregation to which labour migrants are exposed, and despite the opulent lifestyles and conspicuous consumption of some of the region's elites and of the wealthy expatriates who settle in Dubai and other hubs, opinion in Pakistan generally seems to reflect a primarily favourable view of Saudi Arabia. Although opinion polls can only give indications of real opinion, a 2008 survey was typical in suggesting that not less than ninety-seven percent of Pakistan's residents held a favourable view of Saudi Arabia to some extent or other. Iran received a sixty-seven percent favourability rating, while the non-GCC Arab countries included in the questionnaire lagged far behind with thirty-three to thirty-nine percent of participants granting them favourable views. The US was rated favourably by nineteen percent of the respondents in that specific



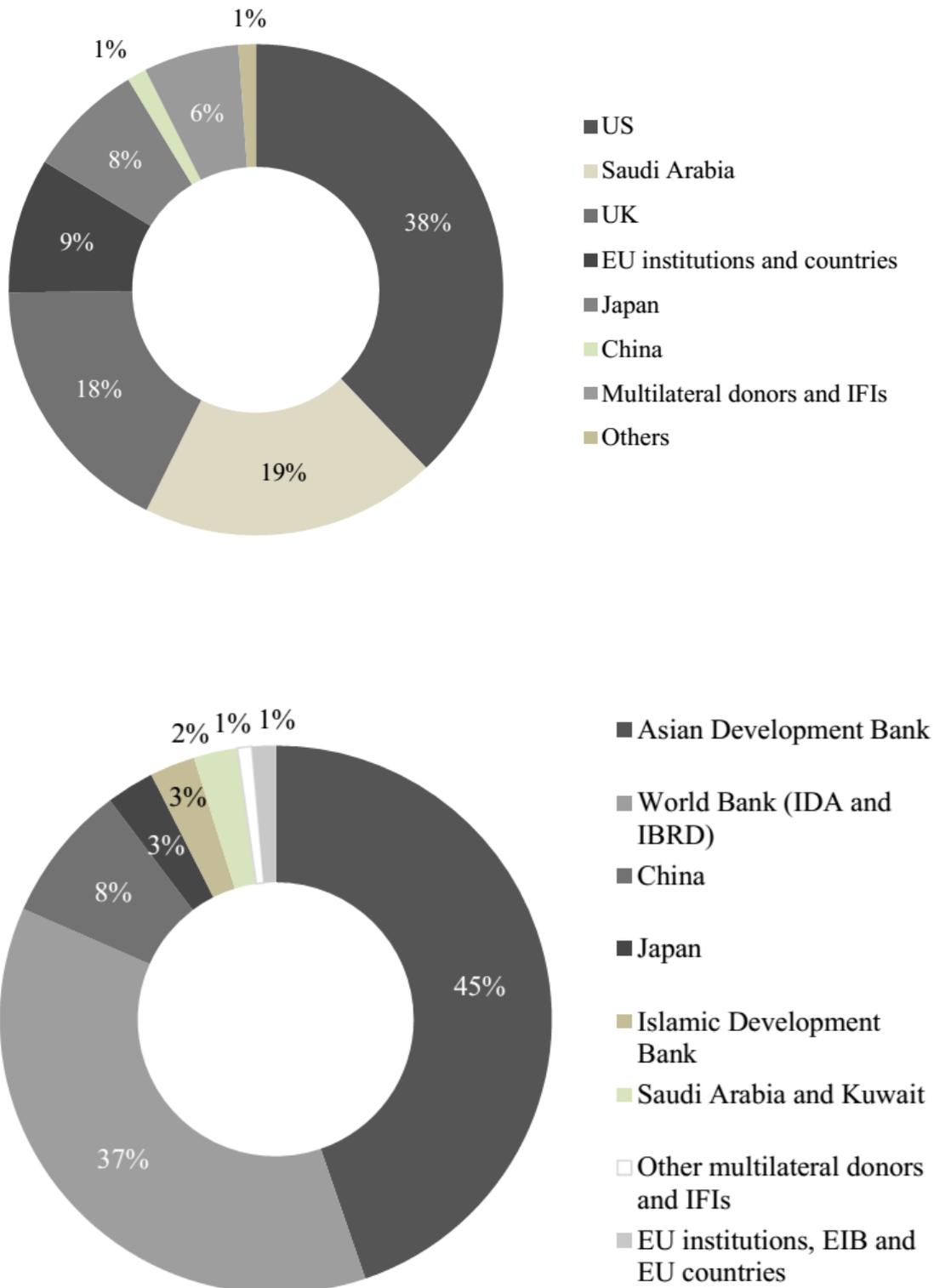
study (Pew Research Center 2008). Of course, this less reflects a popular endorsement of the GCC region's political regimes and power elites than it does the positive associations generated by the employment and income opportunities they provide, and by Mecca, Medina, and the Hajj. This author's anecdotal evidence and impressions gathered in Pakistan suggest that popular feelings are much more mixed and vary according to personal experiences and the international climate of the moment.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the idea that Pakistan exists in a sub-imperialist relationship with the GCC bloc needs to be considered in relation to the humanitarian aid and development cooperation provided by the GCC region to Pakistan. Here again, the most prominent interactions are those between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser extent, between Pakistan, the UAE, and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia's semi-governmental aid body al-Igata – better known as the International Islamic Relief Organization – has been almost constantly operating in Pakistan since 1982 (Observatoire de l'action humanitaire 2016). Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization and various semi-governmental and private charities from the UAE and Qatar have also been present in the country since their initial involvement began during the period from 1989 to 1999. The graph in Figure 4 shows that, in terms of registered humanitarian assistance between 1999 and 2013, Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries formed the



fourth-largest bloc of donors to Pakistan after the US, the EU (both as an institution and through its individual member states), and private donors including individuals, organisations, and companies in the affected country and beyond.

In a number of specific crises like those caused by Pakistan's floods in the summer of 2010, Saudi Arabia's contributions were much more prominent. With \$242.2 million in aid, it was the third-largest donor after the US, which contributed \$631.7 million, and private donors who added a further \$247.5 million to the total. However, if we add in the \$96 million from the five other GCC countries, of which \$77 million came from the UAE and \$9.25 million from Kuwait, it becomes clear that the GCC as a bloc actually ranked second and contributed a



total of \$338.2 million in relief aid during the flood crisis.<sup>17</sup> If we look at Figure 5, we see that – in terms of the development grants alone that were allocated to Pakistan in the period between 2004 and 2009 – Saudi Arabia was Pakistan’s second-largest donor after the US. The grants were especially directed at post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction and at social



and economic infrastructure development and they often serve to facilitate later economic investment.<sup>18</sup> They were either disbursed bilaterally or through the Islamic Development Bank of which Saudi Arabia is the largest individual shareholder.

Saudi Arabia and other GCC states also continue to contribute to the activities of specialised UN organisations in Pakistan. The circumstances which prompt the granting of GCC development aid to Pakistan are generally quite volatile and focused on urgent responses to major adverse events like the earthquake in northern Pakistan, the Swat offensive, the 2010 floods, and the energy crisis.<sup>19</sup> Significant contributions to development aid come from the UAE and Kuwait as well as from Saudi Arabia. By contrast to this pattern for the sourcing and deployment of development grants, loans to Pakistan are most often disbursed, not from the GCC countries, but from international financial institutions and development banks in which the US plays either a key role or wields considerable influence. The GCC countries' share of these loans does not exceed five percent, even when the input of the Islamic Development Bank is taken into account.

The activity of 'classical' international financial institutions and development banks in Pakistan has grown strongly since Pakistan became a frontline state in the so-called War on Terror; it has also increased in the wake of setbacks like natural disasters and the energy crisis with which the country has been coping since 2007.<sup>20</sup> Critics see this increase as evidence of the 'buy-off' of Pakistan's establishment in return for cooperation with foreign geopolitical agendas. They regard the increasing debt and adverse loan conditions as deleterious to Pakistan and its society. Last but not least, it is vital to remember here that the remittance economy – the primary sources of which are the GCC countries and especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE – can be interpreted as an alternative channel of aid. Remitted funds arguably have much more direct impact at the grassroots level in terms of fostering communities' ability to cope and their investment capacity than official development assistance ever does.

### **A Conclusion in the Light of Recent Events**

As one can see, the interaction between Pakistan and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is multi-faceted and pretty much set on the interface of the geopolitical and social grassroots because of the religious dimension and labour migration. Now, to come back to the initial question, do we have a case in which Pakistan exists in a sub-imperialist relationship with the entire GCC bloc, or at the very least with Saudi Arabia and the UAE? At first glance, it is tempting to see Pakistan merely as a provider of mercenaries, cheap labour, and cultivable land for the GCC countries and for their respective interest groups. This is also how some opinion makers describe it. The financial aid, advantageous oil deliveries, and of course the remittances from Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, are definitely of enormous importance to Pakistan, and, while they may not be essential for its outright survival, they contribute greatly to its ability to function. This level of reliance means that Pakistan is vulnerable to economic downturns and political unrest in the Persian-Arab Gulf. The power elites of Pakistan thus have a vested interest in helping to ensure the continuity and stability of regimes in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries.

The relationships and interactions between the GCC economies and Pakistan clearly do have more than a few characteristics of sub-imperialism. These characteristics are particularly striking in Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia which largely exercises its influence in political and economic ways; they are also there in the UAE's economic influence and effects on Pakistan. In sum, the interaction is situated at the nexus of pan-Islamic diplomacy connected to Saudi Arabia's capacity as guardian of the Ummah's sacred sites, the interests of the respective nation-states, an urge towards economic diversification within the GCC, and the creation and effect of the Gulf's globalist city hubs.

Pakistan is not completely nor typically peripheral here. It has more military strength and experience, as well as a more diverse industrial base, than the GCC countries; it also produces military hardware and delivers defence expertise to Saudi Arabia and other GCC states. It has the distinction of being the only Islamic nuclear power to date. Pakistan's potential may be stunted due to setbacks, political factors, and lack of capital, but it is not a fully-fledged or completely passive periphery. What we have, in effect, is an interaction between *semi*-peripheries, an interaction that is defined and shaped by a confluence of historical factors, genuine and perceived security paradigms, and economic geography. Once more, much revolves around the ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Unlike the UAE, with which Pakistan's links are of a more economic nature, the ties with Saudi Arabia are highly political and ideological: both states – Saudi Arabia as the guardian of the Ummah's sacred sites and Pakistan as a modern nation-state which was founded for an Islamic community – are entities which, in their formation and in the construction of their legitimacy, are closely intertwined with Islam or certain interpretations thereof.

Pakistan, and the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states have long been crucial US allies, and so they have benefited from considerable strategic dividends, among which are those derived from the containment of Soviet as well as Baathist socialism before 1991, support against Iran after 1979, and more recently, since 2001, participation in the fight against a much less defined, fluid and ubiquitous terrorist threat. Pakistan is also a major recipient of aid from both the US and the international financial institutions that the US controls. More than a few political opinion makers, both in Pakistan and in the Persian-Arab Gulf, feel that this relationship with the US serves a neo-imperial agenda of control over the Ummah, its sacred sites, and its resources, one that is against the very Islamic character and destiny of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup> There is another factor that jeopardises the effectiveness of the religious dimension of interaction, and the ties between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and that is the perception that pan-Islamic diplomacy is operating as an alibi for Saudi Arabia's bid to mobilise or enhance a Sunni axis against Iran and the Shia sphere in general.

Within Pakistan, there are vocal actors who, and movements which, have for some time been calling on the country to take a less amenable line vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia and the GCC; for these critics, the Yemen crisis and the Saudi-Arab League intervention there emphasised once more the need for a stronger position. A number of patriotic opinion makers and people in oppositionist circles believe that Pakistan should avoid entanglement in conflicts that divide



the Ummah and in which Pakistan, eventually to its own detriment, merely acts as a sub-contractor for Saudi Arabia and the UAE. More importantly in this instance, though, is, in this author's opinion, the reluctance of the military to become actively involved in the Yemeni Civil War. The Pakistani army, with Shia represented in its rank and file and its upper echelons, is not sectarian and is not eager to enter into a proxy war with Iran (See also Waraich 2015). As the army is the structure on which the country's cohesion is largely based, Pakistan is also apprehensive about overstretching militarily and about exacerbating Sunni-Shia tensions within Pakistan itself during a period when it is heavily involved in fighting Takfiri insurgents at home.

So, to conclude, the ties, channels, and networks that exist between Pakistan and the Persian-Arab Gulf form a geopolitical habitat based on complementarity that is crucial in enhancing the sustainability, if not partly the survival, of the states involved, especially Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Because of its historical and civilizational and religious dimension, this complementarity transcends mere economic interests. It will be interesting to see, in the mid-term, how this entire ideological and social-economic set of relationships, and their position in the wider Islamic world, will be further shaped by the newer generation of leaders in Pakistan and the GCC sphere and by various groups and individuals in the respective regions that seek to contest and resist the present world order and the incumbent political and economic elites who sustain it. The role and intensity of Islamic identity politics in this whole process will also shape future developments.

### Notes:

1. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC, *مجلس التعاون الخليجي* in Arabic) or Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG) to give it its full title, was formed during the Iran-Iraq war in 1981 as a framework for economic, political, and security cooperation and regional integration between six Arab states that border the Persian-Arab Gulf. Its member states at the present time are, in alphabetical order, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The organisation's website is at <http://www.gcc-sg.org>. For background on the GCC's formation and the real and perceived interests behind it, see Ramazani and Kechichian (1988).
2. Parts of this text were previously published in an earlier draft in the Central Asia Economic Papers series of the Elliott School of International Affairs. See De Cordier (2013).
3. For more in-depth examinations, see Agius (2005) and Nicolini (2006).
4. The armed forces in the rest of the GCC region numbered 152,000 in total, with the UAE (51,000) and Oman (47,000) expanding most in this area. See International Institute for Strategic Studies (2014), *The Military Balance* (2014), the SIPRI database (2016), and Koch and Long (1997).
5. See Bennis, Moushabeck and Said (1998) p. 297; F. Khan (2012) p. 383; and Mason (2014) p. 58.
6. See Al-Jazeera, (2014) and Le Nouvel Observateur (2014). Takfirism (*تكفيري*) is a purist and often violent current within Sunni Islam. Its adherents believe that all Muslims (and, in the first instance, all Shia and Sufis) who deviate from their very strict interpretation of the actions and statements of the prophet Muhammad and his companions should be excommunicated. The movement, the origins of which can be traced back to the early times of Islam, gained fresh impetus in Egypt in the years from 1971 to 1973 and after the start of the Syrian War. It is believed to have provided ideological inspiration for Daesh and other groups since 2011. See also Alshammari (2013).
7. For an elaborate examination of Daesh's support and funding networks and mechanisms, see Napoléoni (2015).
8. For an in-depth study of defence-related business structures and activities in Pakistan, see Siddiq (2013). The influence of this military-economic relationship between the GCC and Pakistan goes even further in the sense that Pakistan and two GCC states (Saudi Arabia and the UAE) were the only countries that officially recognised the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (until they were pressured by the US and the UN to withdraw their recognition in late 2001). The Taliban's Islamic Emirate (not to be confused with Islamic State or Daesh), existed from the autumn of 1996 until late 2001 and continued as a shadow state in parts of the country after its official demise. This internationally isolated entity was seen not only as a common sphere of influence, but as a society and economy which could be steered by Pakistan and the GCC's leading countries during its reconstruction after years of civil war thanks to their recognition.
9. See Grimett (2011), Center for Global Development (n.d., a, b) and Niblock (2006). With \$13.8 billion in purchases between 2007 and 2010, Saudi Arabia was the foremost buyer of US arms and military equipment in that period. Pakistan was seventh with contracts worth \$4.1 billion. Both countries are also major clients of the UK's arms industry, and



received various forms of military aid from the US, especially during the Cold War and since the War on Terror began.

10. See Gallup Pakistan and Gilani Research Foundation (2015) and Institute for Public Opinion Research (2015).
11. See Khan and Khan (2011) and Board of Investment of Pakistan (2016).
12. Pakistan's foreign orientation towards Saudi Arabia and the Persian-Arab Gulf in general was especially explicit under the leadership of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq who was in office from the autumn of 1978 until the summer of 1988.
13. For a case study, see Suleri and Savage (2006).
14. For more in-depth examinations of the political economy of the Hajj and Umrah, see Leverrier (1996) and Bianchi (2008).
15. For a discussion of the differences and similarities between Wahhabism and Salafism, see Stanley (2005). Wahhabism, which is the official religion of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is believed to be adhered to by 22.9 percent of the native or naturalised Muslim population in Saudi Arabia where Wahhabi Sunni Muslims thus form a dominant minority: 44.8 percent in the UAE, 46.87 percent in Qatar, 2.17 percent in Kuwait, and 5.7 percent in Bahrain. See Izady (2014).
16. The role of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in quelling or hijacking some of the recent Arab revolts, as well as the role of companies and investors from GCC economies in land grabbing practices, has certainly affected popular views in some sectors of society, not least among the sizeable Shia minority and those in the affected agricultural areas.
17. UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (2016) and IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis (2010).
18. For example, part of the land that is being acquired for agro-industrial investment by firms and groups from Saudi Arabia is purchased from a global \$556 million agricultural development line from the Saudi Fund for Development.
19. See, for example, Baker, Tierney and Weissberger (2010). The picture is never clear since much development aid from Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries is not reported as such and is also tied to economic investments from the GCC in the country.
20. Center for Global Development, (n.d., a, b). Note that Saudi Arabia gives in-kind loans to Pakistan to help it cope with energy shortages in the form of oil supplies and deferred payments. It did so, for example, when Pakistan suffered economic sanctions due to its nuclear programme between 1998 and 2002, and again after the general elections of 2013 when a coalition perceived to be more friendly was elected into power.
21. See also Saïdi (2009). Some critics even consider the close ties between the GCC and Pakistan to be a way to further anchor the country in the wider orbit of US and NATO by proxy, so as to further roll back its independence. For details on the various forms of GCC-NATO cooperation, in particular against Iran, and for the overthrow of Saddam in Iraq and Gadhafi in Libya, see Nazemroaya (2012).

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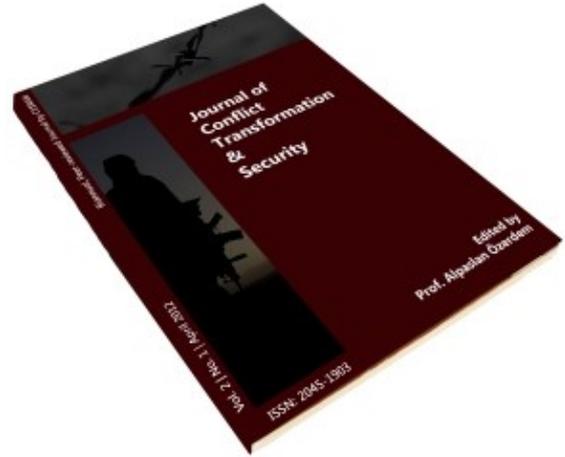


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