



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**

**K n o w l e d g e   f o r   A l l**

**16th Gulf Research Meeting**

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**Workshop No. 12**

## **Humanitarian Diplomacy and Mediation in the Gulf: Pathways to Regional Stability**

### **1. Directors**

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### **2. Abstract**

Humanitarian dimensions of conflict resolution remain under-researched globally. As the humanitarian systems structural changes, it is particularly important to consider how Global South stakeholders, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council's member states engage with major humanitarian initiatives and how those initiatives contribute to mediation and conflict resolution efforts in the wider region. This workshop will look at the intersection of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts from the perspectives of thematic and area-based experts on GCC and wider Western Asia and North Africa region. From Gaza to Yemen, from Somalia to Sudan, the workshop will facilitate a space of evidence-generation on GCC perspectives on the humanitarian track in its wider regional foreign policies and explore how national and institutional agencies intersect now and in the future. Drawing on evidence from engagements such as reconstruction conferences, multilateral and bilateral funding initiatives, workshop participants will explore how humanitarian service delivery objectives contribute to local capacities for peace and wider conflict resolution efforts. Participants will be asked to engage with

issues of soft power and articulate ways that GCC could engage with global policy shifts such as the “humanitarian reset,” the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus, and other initiatives (including self-defined, indigenous research into Gulf perspectives on charity, aid and peace). Participants would be encouraged to engage with GCC’s vision for humanity, including addressing transnational challenges, and the importance of dialogue, pluralism and humanitarian engagement. Participants will be invited to reflect on the GCC’s vision for humanity by drawing evidence from community-led humanitarian and peacebuilding initiatives , as well as national foreign policy plans, and build a research trajectory to help inform a GCC approach to mediation, conflict resolution and humanitarian response grounded in human security principles.

By situating the Gulf within broader debates on soft power and digital diplomacy, the workshop will advance theoretical and empirical understanding of how digital ecosystems—from influencers to algorithms—mediate global perceptions of the region. It will bring together scholars from communication, marketing, international relations, and Gulf studies to analyze case studies of successful campaigns, as well as the risks posed by misinformation, reputational crises, and dependence on global platforms. The workshop welcomes comparative, cross-national, and multidisciplinary contributions that illuminate the Gulf’s role in shaping narratives across Africa, Europe, and Asia. Ultimately, it seeks to provide both academic insights and policy-relevant recommendations on how digital communication can enhance the Gulf’s soft power and global standing.

### **3. Context**

The GCC has had a marked increase in engagement with the wider peace and security agenda, including humanitarian initiatives. GCC countries collectively are some of the largest donors of humanitarian relief worldwide, and are increasingly engaged in shaping the international development landscape. In a context where multilateral institutions and the rules-based international order find themselves in situations of fragility, GCC states have increasingly come into focus and have adopted principles that reinforce efforts to rebuild trust in the international system. The GCC has also played a leading role in the international community on both peace and development. GCC members have played important roles in mediating tensions and armed conflicts in the wider region, as well as globally. As the wider international community looks to review development assistance, including humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts, this is an opportune time to explore GCC countries’ and GCC institutional approaches to peace and humanitarian efforts, drawing on national, regional and global expertise. National universities in GCC states are generating new knowledge on humanitarian and mediation approaches, and the GRM is well placed to explore GCC and global evidence base and generate innovative recommendations to the wider international community – to better inform foreign policy

and regional cooperation, while meeting objectives of preserving human dignity through peacebuilding and principled humanitarian relief.

#### **4. Workshop Focus/Objectives**

The Workshop will help map intersections between Gulf-led mediation and global policy shifts. It will help identify where Gulf mediation practice aligns with or advances (HDP) Nexus, the emerging “humanitarian reset,” localization, and climate-security agendas and what these intersections imply for regional influence and norm-setting. It will also help build a shared evidence base and forward the mediation and aid research agendas as well as help consolidate data, lessons, and comparative cases into an accessible evidence hub, and co-develop a multi-year research trajectory to guide GCC institutions, universities, and policymakers in articulating a coherent mediation, humanitarian strategy.

#### **5. Paper Focus/Topics**

We invite paper proposals that explore the following issues:

- GCC perspectives on the links between humanitarian relief and mediation;
- GCC perspectives on the role of humanitarian aid (including essential services) in conflict prevention and mediation;
- Coherence and divergence in Gulf countries’ perspectives on the state of the humanitarian system, including humanitarian principles and their implementation, as well as their intersection with development and peacebuilding agendas;
- Case studies of GCC cooperation (DRC-Rwanda, Sudan, etc.);
- The role of gender and social norms in shaping mediation efforts, and the contribution of humanitarian action to these dimensions;
- The future of aid: how does the development, relief and peace engage with the future of the SDGs – perspectives from Gulf states, private sector, academia and other stakeholders.

#### **6. Publication Plans**

The workshop directors are planning a joint publication and/or papers to be published individually in peer-reviewed journals or as GRC papers. A number of humanitarian, peace and security publishers are being considered.

## 7. References

- GCC-UK Ministerial Meeting Joint statement (2025) <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news2025-9-24-5.aspx> Doha Forum, et al “Future of International Cooperation Report 2025” [https://dohaforum.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/fic-25.pdf?sfvrsn=d073b3f4\\_1](https://dohaforum.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/fic-25.pdf?sfvrsn=d073b3f4_1) Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, “Small States Big Conflicts: Strategic Analysis of Qatar’s Conflict Resolution Initiatives,” (2024) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25765949.2024.2411103?scroll=top&needAccess=true> The Washington Institute, “The Arab Approach to Mediation – Reshaping Diplomacy in a Multipolar World” (2024) <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/arab-approach-mediation-reshaping-diplomacy-multipolar-world> Conciliation Resources, “Still time to talk,” (2024) <https://www.c-r.org/accord/still-time-talk/qatars-mediation-%E2%80%93-motivations-acceptance-and-modalities> ICVA: a Global NGO Network for Principled and Effective Humanitarian Action – “the IASC Humanitarian Reset examined” (2025) <https://www.icvanetwork.org/humanitarianreset/> Search for Common Ground, “Localizing Women, Peace and Security,” (2024) <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Issue-Brief-Localizing-WPS-Search-for-Common-Ground.pdf> ICRC’s Humanitarian Law & Policy, “Toward national implementation of IHL: Arab states pledge their commitment,” (2024) <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2024/02/15/towards-national-implementation-of-ihl-arab-states-pledge-their-commitment/>

## 8. Workshop Directors

**Naglaa Elhag** is an experienced senior leader with over 25 years of experience in international development, peace building and the humanitarian sector with track records in leading and managing huge operations and diverse teams in multiple countries in Africa, Europe, Middle East and South East Asia. Naglaa joined Search for Common Ground in 2022 as a Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa region “MENA.” In this role, she oversees Search’s programs in Yemen, Iraq, Tunis, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. Naglaa began her career in the international development and peace building sector in 1997 when she joined the development section at the Dutch Embassy in her home country Sudan. She then joined several INGOs in senior roles, in high risks and complex

countries. Most recently, she heads the international programs of Qatar Red Crescent, managing operations in 37 countries. Naglaa earned her Master's Degree in International Development (Politics of Alternative Development) from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Netherlands. She speaks Arabic, English, Dutch and German.

**Dr. Mohammed Alsoussi** earned his PhD in Sustainable Environment from the University of Nottingham in the UK. He has accumulated eighteen years of field and headquarters experience in Middle East, North Africa and East Europe in development, humanitarian, conflict and peace-building programming and capacity building of local societies. He has served in various capacities in Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and Lebanon. He also has managed operations remotely in Libya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, and Ukraine. Dr. Alsousi took part in numerous international events. For instance, he attended workshops at the World Economic Forum in Jordan and delivered a speech in Geneva, addressing the UN Secretary-General and heads of member states about the dire situation in Yemen.