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Cooperation or Conflict: Using Alliance Theory to Explain the Current Gulf Cooperation Council Crisis

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What caused the current diplomatic crisis between countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council? I analyze this question through the lens of alliance politics. In the past, scholars have used these different theories to explain the formation and sustainability of certain alliances, including North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Specifically, I test Walt's theory of the Balance of Threat against others to see which can best explain the Council's downfall. Using a case study research design, I disaggregate the alliance into three notable periods: formation, sustained cooperation, and discord. My findings reveal that Walt's theory lacks certain factors that explain the downfall of the GCC, which can be found in other alliance theories.

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Introduction

In the beginning of June 2017, three countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council cut diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar, those countries include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Although the exact motives behind this blockade are fairly vague, the coalition led by Saudi Arabia cites multiple reasons for their actions against the oil rich state. These include supporting terrorism in the region through Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that has been outlawed as a terrorist organization by the boycotting nations, and Qatar's close links to Iran who is Saudi Arabia's regional adversary and threatens stability in the region by supporting Shia' majority groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi's in Yemen.

Qatar has denied all these allegations and pointed to their assistance towards the United States in their war on terror as proof of innocence. However, since the start of the crisis, Qatar has reestablished all diplomatic and economic ties with Iran which supports part of the allegations. The Saudi Arabian led coalition listed thirteen demands in order to reestablish diplomatic and economic ties between the gulf countries, these demands include closing Al-Jazeera and other Qatari funded news sources, closing the Turkish military base in Qatar, reducing diplomatic ties with Iran while also expelling any Iranian Revolutionary Guard Members residing in their state, and announce that it is severing ties with "Extremist" organizations including the Muslim Brotherhood.

A month following the blockade, German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel, following a tour of the Gulf countries, stated that he was cautiously optimistic that the states would reach a solution once they had finalized talks. However, over a year has passed since the beginning of the diplomatic dispute and no action has taken place to potentially restore their relationship. Qatar is one of the richest countries in the world and is therefore vital to increase economic development

in the Gulf. They also are key strategic allies to western countries, including the United States who conduct military operations from the Al-Udeid Base to fight their war on terrorism in the region. Due to the vast advantages that comes with securing stability with Qatar, it is puzzling that there isn't a greater push for restoring this relationship. Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said, "it is important that the GCC remain a unified front" (Al-Jazeera 2017). Other top diplomats in Russia, Iran, Turkey and India stated the high importance of solving the dispute between the Gulf Countries to prevent terrorism expansion in the region and ensure the flow of resources from Qatar to the rest of the world.

Since the crisis has endured for several years with no viable solution, I turn to alliance theory to explain whether the GCC has served its purpose and should no longer continue as an alliance. By using Walt's framework for alliance theory, I focus on how threat, domestic political stability and ideology, and United States entanglement in the GCC impact their formation, sustainability and recent downfall. There is minimal variation in threat facing these countries over the three time periods, meaning there should have been no theoretical reason for a crisis to occur. Therefore, Walt's argument is not complete as other factors are clearly impacting this alliance. I find this other factor in Schweller's balance of interest's theory, where states with similar interests will form an alliance. My research shows that with the lack of direct military threat (which is the current situation for these Gulf States) countries will form alliances based on similar interests, hence why Qatar has become closer with the likes of Turkey and Iran following the Arab Spring.

In the pages that follow, I provide an empirical section on the Gulf Cooperation Council to better explain the history of the alliance. Then, I review the scholarly literature which argues the formation, maintenance and disbandment of alliances. Next, I present my research design which further explains the three independent variables I used over three different time periods. Finally, I

discuss my findings and the importance it has on the future of this conflict and how it can be used for other important alliances.

Brief History of the Gulf Cooperation Council

To answer our question, it is important to provide background on this thirty-seven-year alliance. The Gulf Cooperation Council is an economic and political alliance that was formed in 1981 by 6 neighboring states, these countries include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. According to the leaders of these countries, this coalition was not a product of the moment, however, it was institutional embodiment of a historical, social and cultural reality. Reyadh Alsafoor, who analyzes the nature and achievements of the GCC, expresses the main reason for the founding of this organization to be security issues facing the countries. He also states, "Its main objectives are a customs union and political cooperation, harmonization of policies, a common external tariff and integration in a specified cultural, geographical, economic, and political setting" (Alasfoor 2007: 16). They also share similar beliefs, mostly rooted in Islamic culture and tradition. However, one of their immediate goals was to protect themselves from the threats created by the Iran-Iraq war. The GCC established a defense planning council that is in charge of coordinating joint military activity in the region. The GCC was instrumental in helping Kuwait during the invasion of Iraq in 1990. This emphasizes the importance of this alliance as it was able to protect, with the help of other international actors, one of its members from being occupied by a larger regional power. In 2004, these nations signed an intelligence sharing pact to counter terrorism in the region to further protect the security of the organization.

Due to their close proximity, they aimed to form an economic alliance that would increase development and trade between these nations. In their first 20 years, the GCC was able to make

great progress towards economic expansion. At first, to ensure economic integration, the members eliminated all customs duties in 1983 to promote the free movement of goods between these countries. The result of this was higher trade between the Gulf States, between 1983 and 1988, the volume of trade jumped from 2% to 11% (Alsafoor 2007). Although, they have not reached the European Union's level of economic integration, all governments of the GCC were determined to take the necessary steps to diversify their economies. The existence of the common market was created in 2008 and a proposition to implement the same currency in the region failed to pass. The GCC conducts yearly meetings between the heads of States and quarterly meetings between foreign ministers, these meetings are used to set the goals and visions for the council. Although the GCC was able to see major progress on economic integration, there was doubt that they could reach their full potential. One of the main challenges facing these nations was that the countries of this alliance had similar economies, which made it more difficult to integrate since they didn't produce complementary goods.

Over the past thirty years, the countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council have been some of the most stable in the region. Much of this has to do with the economic and political alliance that allows them to grow into a reliable ally to the United States. This alliance proved important especially during a time period where the Middle East faced instability and internal threats. These include the rising tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis, fear of the Iraq-Iran war spilling into neighboring countries, and the rise of radical extremism. Due to the domestic political instability in many countries, there was a lack of long-term alliances in the region. The GCC was dependable to the U.S, because of their overall stability.

However, during the 2000s, when several of the GCC goals were not being met including full economic integration, disagreement sparked between few of the member states over border

demarcation, energy exploitation, and foreign policy approaches. Tensions were rising especially when the rest of the block disagreed with Qatar's foreign policy decisions. To solve this issue, the member states met in 2013 and signed the Riyadh agreement which laid requirements for Qatar to prevent any potential diplomatic disputes. These include lack of interference in internal affairs of the council's states, no support for the Muslim Brotherhood or any faction of the Muslim Brotherhood, and to prevent any support for any faction in Yemen that could pose a potential threat to neighboring states. However, in 2014, countries in the GCC alleged Qatar broke that agreement and retracted their diplomats for 9 months. Kuwait was a key player in resolving this diplomatic dispute and was expected to do the same in the most recent crisis. Although a similar situation occurred in 2014, the one today is far worse as it has a larger threat on the economy and political security of the region.

When analyzing alliances, scholars try to understand and predict how they form or break apart. One of the longest alliances that provides us with this framework is NATO, it was the first peacetime alliance with a goal to provide collective security against the USSR. However, many questions are left unanswered. Would a lack of threat lead to the downfall of an alliance? What other factors could be impacting them? It is difficult to criticize the coalitions actions against Qatar on empirical grounds however, I treat the GCC crisis as a case study to answer these puzzling questions on alliance theory and to explain certain gaps in Walt's research.

Literature Review

The specific factors that I analyze throughout my thesis to explain the formation, maintenance and disbanding of the Gulf Cooperation Council stem from some of the main theories of alliance formation in international relations. The main theoretical basis of alliance formation was described by Goerge Liska in 1963. He states "It is impossible to speak of international

relations without referring to alliances; the two often merge in all but name. For the same reason, it has always been difficult to say much that is peculiar to alliances on the plane of general analysis" (Liska 1962: 3). His theory could be summarized into four main principles. First, weaker states align themselves with core powers for the sake of protecting themselves from a potential adversary, as well as achieving status and stability. Second, defensive alliance formation is often rationalized through the function of common ideology. Third, the efficacy of alliances lies in their capability to always deter the common threat. Finally, key reasons for alliance dissolution lie in unequal distribution of costs and benefits, as well as the disappearance of the common threat (Liska 1963).

Although this research was widely accepted in alliance theory, he initially received criticism on his methodological point of view. Critics argue there needs to be a more clearly defined definition for alliance theory. Liska fails to create a connection between contemporary theoretical thinking on this subject and his own writings (Modelski 1963). Since the methodological view point was mainly critiqued, the actual substance of his argument remained valid through a realist perspective.

Realism is one of the main theories of international relations, this is defined as a struggle for power among self-interested states and is generally pessimistic about eliminating conflict and war. This theory of international relations gave rise to the Balance of Power theory in alliance formation. Scholars like Liska (1962) Morgenthau (1960) and Kaplan (1957) are part of this school of thought. They believe that rational motivated behavior drives alliance, meaning that nations will most likely join weaker coalitions to prevent a large power from forming. This theory was further defined by Waltz, he states "Balance of power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive" (Waltz 1979: 121). Ultimately, the goal of the Balance of Power theory is to offset the

growth of a nation by balancing against a potential large power. One of the older scholars of this theory, Quincy Wright (1942) stated that it is a prevention method, so states wouldn't attempt an act of aggression due to a response coordinate by a combination of powerful countries. The sole purpose of the balance of threat theory is similar to the ideology of realism, this school of thought assumes that we live in an anarchic society and therefore the theory that they propose ensure the security and independence of the nations involved in the alliance.

Arguably, one of the biggest flaws of the balance of threat theory is that it doesn't explain why alliances do not form. However, Stephen M. Walt tried to approach this issue from a different perspective. Instead of focusing solely on balancing power between nations who are currently at peace, he developed a theory on how countries will balance when identifying a certain threat. This is the balance of threat theory which narrows the gap from previous research while also providing a different lens for explaining alliances. He defines an alliance as "a formal or informal arrangement of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states" (Walt 1987:1). Due to the immediate threat facing the Gulf States prior to 1981, this definition of alliance is important as it explains the initial foundation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in face of regional threat. This provides justification for using his theory for this specific topic.

Balance of threat theory explains that states will form alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions who pose a threat. These states would risk their own survival to prevent a hegemon from becoming too strong. On the other hand, bandwagon theory states that a country will ally with rather than against the dominant side, these states tend to be attracted to strengths and believe they would avoid an attack on themselves by doing this. This theory is similar to that of balance of power; however, it shifts the focus to nations facing a threat. Walt's studies actually find the opposite of this, states are more likely to balance instead of bandwagon "this is because

an alignment that preserves most of a state's freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon" (Walt 1985: 15). He supports his theory with numerous case studies of alliances in West Asia from 1955 to 1979.

It is false to argue that threats facing a nation is only characterized by its opponent's strength, as a weaker country can also pose a threat to their neighbors. There are four important characteristics when analyzing the level of threat facing a country. The first is aggregate power which focuses on the size of a state's resources, these include population, industrial and military capability, and technological prowess. The larger they are, the greater threat they can pose on a country. The second is the geographical proximity the threat is to a country, aggregate power declines when facing a larger distance. Third component of threat is offensive power, countries with larger offensive power are more likely to provoke an alliance. The final characteristic of a threat is aggressive intentions, these play a crucial role in alliance formation since a country with greater aggressive intentions are more likely to provoke alliance.

Multiple scholars have used Walt's theory on specific cases of alliance formation, especially during the cold war, where countries had to make important decisions facing considerable threat. One example focuses on the relationship between China and Pakistan, "China's problems with India were exacerbated by a precarious relationship with the Soviet Union. China embarked on an enduring strategic relationship with Pakistan. Cooperation with Pakistan did effectively balance the Indian Threat and prevented India from focusing on China. China used the elements of its own national power - political, economic, military power and nuclear cooperation to influence Pakistan. This case study supports the balance of threat theory" (Watson 2002; 1). This theory will be useful when analyzing whether the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are facing a credible threat and how they respond to it over the three different time periods.

Walt's second point looks at whether having similar ideological or cultural similarities creates alliances. If countries have similar values they are able to defend their own political principles, they may potentially fear each other less and could enhance the legitimacy of a weak regime. His hypothesis was that these factors would be sufficient to prescribe alignment. However, the alternative to this is that certain ideological types promote conflict among similar states rather than cooperation. Therefore, Walt describes how large a role ideology plays in alliance formation. He finds that ideology plays a subordinate role. When states are not secure, obeying a single authoritative leader increases the likelihood of conflict. Walt uses the Pan-Arab ideology as an example, "Although support for Arab unity was an important component of regime legitimacy after 1955, implementation of the idea threatened the existence of each separate regime" (Walt 1985: 22). Therefore, security preferences take precedence over ideological preferences.

Walt's final factor that he states could impact alliance formation is military and economic aid or political penetration. The hypothesis states that this assistance would create effective allies. He finds multiple reasons that argue against this statement. Countries looking for aid could obtain it elsewhere, weaker states bargain harder and stronger states will not cut off their supplies since it leaves their allies vulnerable, large aid may actually indicate that the recipient has successfully manipulated the provider and it strengthens the recipient's position. Aid can also be self-defeating, a quote that he uses from Henry Kissinger provides a real-life example to this issue "I ask [Israeli Prime Minister] Rabin to make concessions, and he says he can't because Israel is weak. So, I give him more arms, and he says he doesn't need to make concessions because Israel is strong" (Walt 1985; 29). Bribery and penetration on their own are considered to be weak determinants of alliance, however, they make existing alliances more effective.

Walt was a catalyst for future research on alliance formation by narrowing the realist school of thought on balance of power theory. This led to further research on the topic, and for scholars to counter Walt's theory of balance of threat. Rendall Schweller was quick to produce a response to Walt's theory and offered an alternative view to bandwagon versus balancing. One of the main arguments against Walt is that it was based on the notion that the only initial reason for an alliance to form is the potential threat a country could encounter. Schweller states merely that "Walt does not offer a theory of alliances so much as a theory of how states respond to external threats" (Schweller 1994: 83). According to Schweller, there is no need for a viable threat for states to create alliances. He provides different definitions for balancing and bandwagon. Balancing is mostly used for self-preservation and protecting the countries values that they believe are sufficient. However, he believes that Walt's definition of bandwagon is flawed in three areas. First, he makes it appear that a state who bandwagons is essentially weak and is strategically surrendering. Second, it contorts the actual meaning of the term. Thirdly, it ignores the entire motivation to bandwagon since it is only used when facing a threat, instead of looking at the profit associated to bandwagon. Therefore, Schweller provides a different definition which explains that states who bandwagon are looking for a self-extension and an opportunity to gain, ultimately, they are viewed as more offensive and countries who balance are more defensive.

These definitions allow him to look at alliance choices through a lens where countries gains are more important than a countries desire for security. Schweller's argument counters Walt's since he believes that states are more likely to bandwagon because countries are motivated by the prospect of gains and states who balance end up paying a higher cost. Poor and dissatisfied countries who lack domestic strength and stability will tend to align with a rising power, since the opportunity aspect of countries to bandwagon outweigh balancing. Neither of the countries I am

researching are considered poor, however, there tends to be discontent within the population due to the power held by the monarchies. However, I believe there is a gap in Schweller's response to Walt, since he only gives the option to balance or bandwagon. It is possible that if a state is facing problems domestically, they will be less likely to form alliances since their main goal would be to stabilize internal dispute and find solutions to stay in power. This is important in the realm of alliance theory and often forgotten by standard balance of power. Bailes et al. argue that small states alliance is better explained by shelter which is the "is the diplomatic, economic, societal, and political alignment response of structurally weak states" (Bailes et all. 2016: 9). This forces smaller countries, like those of the GCC, to focus more on domestic as much as international factors when forming relationships. Another reason that I look at domestic problems is because according to Steven David "Third World alignment decisions as a result of the Third World leadership's need to counter all threats" (David 1991: 233). Which include both "internal and external threats" (David 1991: 223). These scholars highlight the significance of identifying domestic instability in alliance formation for smaller states.

After strongly opposing Walt's theory that states prefer to balance instead of bandwagon, Schweller provides an alternative theory of alliance, the balance of interests. The theory has two levels or meanings "it refers to the costs a state is willing to pay to defend its values relative to the costs it is willing to pay to extend its values. At the systemic level, it refers to the relative strengths of status quo and revisionist states" (Schweller1994: 99). When looking at why states would align, this allows him to look at the full range of states interests instead of solely focusing on the threat they are facing. He splits up states into four groups: the first are the lions, who are determined to protect their ideologies and prefer to stick with the current status instead of looking to expand. The second are lambs who are willing to defend their values at a low cost, these tend to be weaker

states. The third are jackals, who are risk averse and opportunistic because they are willing to pay high costs to defend their belongings, however, are willing to spend a greater cost to extend their values. Schweller calls the last group of nations wolfs, they are willing to take the greatest risks since they value what they could potentially receive far more than what they currently possess.

The different theories proposed by Schweller and Walt can be used under the same context when analyzing the crises facing the Middle East and how they could potentially impact the Gulf Cooperation Council. Walt's balance of threat theory will be the base for identifying the threats facing the GCC and see how the member states respond to it. These threats usually come from wars and tension in the region. However, a country's interests in these different situations may change over time and could play a crucial role in a countries decision to form alliances. Although Walt will be used as the base throughout most of my research, I will also use Schweller's theory to fill in any gaps that could be missing from Walt. Since threat is unavoidable in the region, there must be something that changes in the last time period that leads to this crisis. I will find that difference through Schweller's theory and find out how important a countries interests are when forming alliances.

Other scholars have looked at alliance theory through a constructivist perspective. Constructivism in international relations theory focuses on the impact that identities and individual's ideologies have on international relations (Walt 1999). Stephen Walt argued that ideology is a subordinate role for alliance formation and should not be diplomat's main objective when forming an alliance. However, other scholars argue that individual's ideology and cultural similarities are key to understanding international relations in great power politics. Mark Haas's relatively new research provides an in-depth analysis on the impact of ideological polarity on state's alliance policies. He focuses on two variables, ideological distribution and ideological

polarity, and three kinds of worlds, unipolar, bipolar and multipolar. The first looks at the degree of ideological differences dividing state leaders and the second focuses on the number of ideologies that define the key actors in a particular system. He states that balancing process in an ideological unipolar, bipolar and multipolar world are all efficient for separate reasons. In a unipolar world, countries view each other as low threats with major common interests. In a bipolar world, two rival alliances will be created based along ideological lines. In order for balancing to be efficient in a multipolar world, state's greatest power and ideological threats must coincide. The most likely outcome is that leaders will be more willing to ally with lesser ideological enemies in order to contain the greatest danger.

Although Haas doesn't directly critique Walt, they differ on how impactful similar ideologies between countries are to creating an alliance. Walt is not denying that similar ideologies can impact alliances; however, Haas believes it is a key component to building relationships between states. He also looks at it through the similar threat perspective that Walt uses. Haas explains how ideological differences will shape leader's perception on threat in two ways. The first is "amplification of the fear that lies at the foundation of the ideological polarization process" (Haas 2014: 722). Head of States sole goal is to stay in power and are worried that differences in ideologies will spread in their nation. Regarding the GCC, one of the main reasons for their genesis, excluding the threat they were facing from the rest of the region, was a similar ideology that brought them together. Therefore, when identifying alliance formation, an important factor for instability in a country is whether opposition or change to the leader of a state will alter the ideology that originally brought the members of the GCC together. This alliance has experienced a change of leadership in multiple countries, I will identify whether this impacted the alliance in a negative way. This leads into Haas's second reason that ideological differences may change a

leader's perception of threat since it has an impact on international intentions, the greater the ideological differences dividing leaders, the more likely they are to assume the worst about one another's objective. The constructivist point of view on alliance formation believes that similar ideologies is at the core of an alliance.

The literature review for alliance theory is very dense and relies heavily on the theories argued between different camps of international relations. Therefore, I focus solely on applying Walt's balance of threat theory to my research design. There is always an apparent threat in the Middle East, therefore, his theory should suggest that the GCC would continue to cooperate as they balance against greater threats like extremism and Iran. I also use his other two variables, similar ideology and foreign involvement, to see how they have impacted the status of the GCC. Although I don't explicitly use Schweller's theory in my research design, he is crucial to filling certain gaps in Walt's theory.

Research Design

To test the preceding expectations about alliance politics, I evaluate the GCC using a case study methodology. I examine the alliance through three different time periods to identify what changes or stays the same over time. The GCC has been relatively stable throughout its existence. Therefore, understanding if an independent variable changed in the final case study, which could explain their downfall, allows me to highlight the gaps that are in Walt's research. This is considered a deductive research since I am testing alliance theory. In these case studies, I conduct qualitative research through process tracing. This allows me to understand some of the causal dynamics that affect the formation, stability and current crisis of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Although my broad terms for independent variables will stay the same, variation occurs over the three time periods. Some factors impacting the general independent variable may be more

relevant in one time period versus another. This is mostly related to the third independent variable, the role played by the international actors, which I solely focus on the United States, and how they impact the GCC alliance. This is because United States influence shifted over the past 35 years as they had periods of greater activity and others where they were inactive. Therefore, I make sure to adjust this variable depending on the time period I am researching. I may use quantitative studies at times to explain the factors impacting my second independent variable, these would include surveys, that explain the internal political stability and culture of the six countries.

Using case studies are an appropriate research method for the question I am looking to answer. Scholars who are looking at different theories of alliance often use case studies to apply them to more narrow solutions. Case studies have been conducted on European countries during the 1930's (Kaufman 1992), the North Atlantic Treaty Association (Sergey 2004), the relationship between Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia from 1970 to 1991 (Gause 2003), and on the genesis of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Priess 1996). Since case studies are generally used for explaining alliance theory, splitting this alliance into three case studies to try and explain the current crisis is appropriate. The reason for this is that if the factors that created the alliance in 1981 are no longer relevant in the third case study, then there is no reason for these countries to continue their alliance. Although, there is minimal variation within the second case study which causes a brief moment of instability within the GCC states. They were mostly stable cooperative throughout the first two case studies. This could give diplomats a different angle for solving this issue, instead of returning to the relationship that they used to have, they could create a more neutral pact that would alleviate tension. However, if the research finds that the characteristics that initiated their alliance are still relevant in the third case study, it would give these countries an incentive to solve this crisis for their greater benefit.

My goal throughout these three different case studies, is to identify whether the Gulf Cooperation Council is cooperating or in conflict. I measure this through their willingness to hold positive diplomatic relations between the countries. This is mostly consistent in the first two case studies, with a little variation in the second. However, it changes drastically in the third. Then, I focus on identifying what variables created this response for each time period. Therefore, my dependent variable for this research is the status of the GCC during a specific time period, cooperation or conflict. The independent variables that I research that determine the outcome of the GCC stem from the literature review. The first comes from Walt's balance of threat theory, meaning I will identify the threat facing the countries of the GCC and how they respond to it. The second is the domestic political stability of the countries in the GCC, which includes the ideological factor in alliances. Finally, there are many international actors that have a large influence in the Middle East, however, I the one that has the largest impact is the United States. I identify the role that the country has and how they potentially shape the outcome of the GCC overtime.

To explain the GCC's change over time, I explore the effect of three separate independent variables. My first independent variable focuses on the threat facing these countries. I use Stephen M. Walt's criteria for alliance formation, decline and the balance of threat as my base for analyzing the GCC. Since his theory is entirely dependent on whether a country is facing a certain threat, I use Walt's definition of the different sources of threat a country could be facing. He looks at four factors that are able to impact threat, these factors are: aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions. Aggregate power is related to the state's total resources (population, military capability, etc.), the greater the resources, the greater the threat they pose on other countries. Proximity allows countries to project power and threat to those around them.

Therefore, "states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away" (Walt 1985: 10). Offensive capability is dependent on a country's military power. If a state has strong military power, they are more likely to provoke an alliance, than weaker states. Finally, Walt identifies "states that appear aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them" (Walt 1985: 12). He uses Hitler during World War II and Colonel Qaddafi of Libya as examples of offensive intentions and how they provoked alliances to form against them.

In addition to Walt's four factors that explain threat caused by a single nation, I also research ongoing conflicts in the region, humanitarian crises and large international disagreements to fully understand the regional threat facing the GCC. The Middle East has always faced some kind of conflict in the last thirty-five years that includes almost every country in the area. They are either directly involved through economic or military aid, or indirectly involved by expressing their support for certain groups in the conflict. Therefore, my goal with this independent variable is to see if the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council always supported each other in these regional conflicts, or if these countries ever had conflicted interests in these disputes. I also look at how certain humanitarian crisis could spill over into the nations of the GCC and destabilize the member countries. Finally, I highlight the United Nations and other countries reaction to these conflicts. This would increase threat since disagreement between stronger nations would make it more difficult to solve the crisis.

To determine the stability of domestic political affairs of the GCC countries, which is my second independent variable, I look at the actions taken by the regime in power that directly impacts the lifestyle of their citizens. Since all of the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council are monarchies, it will be difficult to notice whether the population is satisfied with those in power. However, I will look at any protests or strikes to determine this. I look at the stability and reactions

of the elite class in these monarchies. Since the ruling families are large in all these countries, we can use their satisfaction as a determinant for countries internal stability. Another way of doing so is to see if there are any groups in the country who openly critique the current king in power at the time.

I also explore the culture and identity of these six countries. Walt stated in his theory that ideology is a subordinate role in alliance formation (Walt 1985). However, other scholars like Mark Haas believe that similar cultures and ideologies are key components to building relationships between states (Haas 2014). To operationalize culture, I look at the countries' primary religion, economic status and social beliefs. The goal is to find multiple similarities between these countries, since according to the GCC that is what they were founded on, and to determine how they impacted this alliance and whether these beliefs changed over time. It is difficult to identify this sort of change in belief; however, leadership turnover or opposition is a good start for identifying a change in a certain country's beliefs. According to the constructivist point of view, the characteristics and ideology of certain leaders have a large impact on international relations. The research I conduct on identity and culture will mostly be through secondary sources including think tanks and other GCC scholars. To further identify any domestic political instability, I look at potential political repression by those in power. If a government does not feel stable, they would take other means necessary to ensure they stay in power, including political repression.

One of the main difficulties that I faced was defining whether a threat created by a different ideology would fall under the first or second independent variable. I understand that this can be viewed as a threat towards one's political system. However, since my research on threat mainly came from a source of power outside the country, I decided to encompass ideological threat under

the second independent variable. It also has a larger impact on domestic political stability, which further legitimizes my stance on this issue.

Finally, the third independent variable focuses on international actors and the role the United States plays in influencing the region and the GCC alliance. In Walt's theory of alliance, bribery and penetration on their own are considered to be weak determinants of alliance, however, they make existing alliances more effective (Walt 1985). Since it would not be practical for me to research all foreign intervention in the GCC, I analyze how the United States has influenced the Middle East over the past 35 years, including war involvement, peace mediation and economic development. More specifically, how they have impacted the relationship between the GCC countries. I identify the economic and military support they provide these countries and see the impact it has on their alliance. I look at agreements that show how involved the United States was during the specific time periods. Finally, I look at how much involvement they had in conflict cooperation and mediation in the region. My initial thought was with more economic and military aid from the United States, countries will slowly drift away from their alliances due to the security and stability they receive from a foreign power.

I examine these factors across three different time periods. Each constitutes a separate case study to test my hypotheses. Within these case studies, I look at the three independent variables that I have described above and how they vary across time. After conducting this research, there are certain variances over the three time periods, this further allows for a better understanding and explanation on the current position of the alliance between these Gulf countries.

The first case study that I examine is from 1979-1981. I start this case study in 1979 because that is also the beginning of the Iranian revolution which is shortly followed by the Iran-Iraq war, which was one of the biggest threats to other countries in the region. When looking at the

independent variables for this time period. I will apply them to all the countries that formed the GCC, these include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar. By the end of this time period, these countries create an alliance. This is arguably my most important case study because it covers me with the main reasons behind the formation of this alliance. I use those same characteristics throughout the next two time periods. For this case study, I can focus more on historical archives and accounts of the GCC countries internal political systems and cultures. Some of this material is obtainable through the Political Science database on the UConn Library website. There are two databases that I will be looking at, the first is Columbia international affairs online which includes articles and reports on international affairs, scholarly articles, papers from university research institutes and non-governmental organizations, foundation-funded research projects, and conference proceedings. The second database is the world's politics review, this contains analysis of global trends across disciplines, with thousands of archived articles and more than 75,000 words of original content produced each month. When identifying domestic political stability and culture, I also look at the iPOLL database which includes polls and data survey results from academic, commercial and media survey organizations such as Gallup Organization, Harris Interactive, Pew Research Associates from 1935 to the present.

The second case study that I conduct covers the stability of the Gulf Cooperation Council from 1982 to 2011. There continues to be a reasonable threat during this time period, since the Iraq-Iran war continues until 1988, Southern Yemen entered a civil war during this time period, and Kuwait, one of the members of the GCC was invaded by Iraq. During this time period, I examine the same factors that initially contributed to the alliance's formation to see if they are still relevant. My initial assumption is that these factors are similar because they were able to continue

this alliance for roughly thirty years. However, there could be other factors that explain why these countries continued to maintain a strong and stable alliance during this period. Due to the fall of the USSR in 1991, there was a shift in power and influence on the international stage. The main country that impacted Middle Eastern affairs during this time period was the United States. However, Iran regained strength in the latter half of this time period by supporting groups like Hezbollah, who is a Shi'a Islamist political and military group in Lebanon. Iran could be characterized as a regional threat facing the GCC and therefore will have to identify how big of a threat they became. As before, I rely on similar resources for this case study.

The third and final case study I analyze is from 2011-2017, this time period can be characterized as the leadup to and eventual crisis facing this alliance. The case begins in 2011 due to the Arab Spring, when large demonstrations took place across many countries in the Middle East and created domestic political instability in the Arab world. For this case, I apply the three independent variables to four of the six countries in the GCC. These countries include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. This doesn't mean that the other countries aren't important in this conflict; however, they have taken a more neutral position and have not contributed as much in trying to solve the issues. My original assumption is that the independent variables will be different compared to the first case study since the relationship between these countries took a sharp turn in the wrong direction. However, regional threat seems to still be relevant during this time period. Multiple civil wars, including the 7 years in Syria and 3 years and counting in Yemen, continue to pose a threat to these countries since Yemen borders Saudi Arabia. These civil wars and the lack of immediate response by the United States, allowed other states to intervene to provide a favorable outcome. I look at the more recent news articles by agencies like

Vox, and reports by non-governmental organizations to research the recent political developments in the region and determine United States involvement.

Here is a table summarizing my research design, including my dependent and independent variables, the three different time periods and factors contributing to each independent variable.
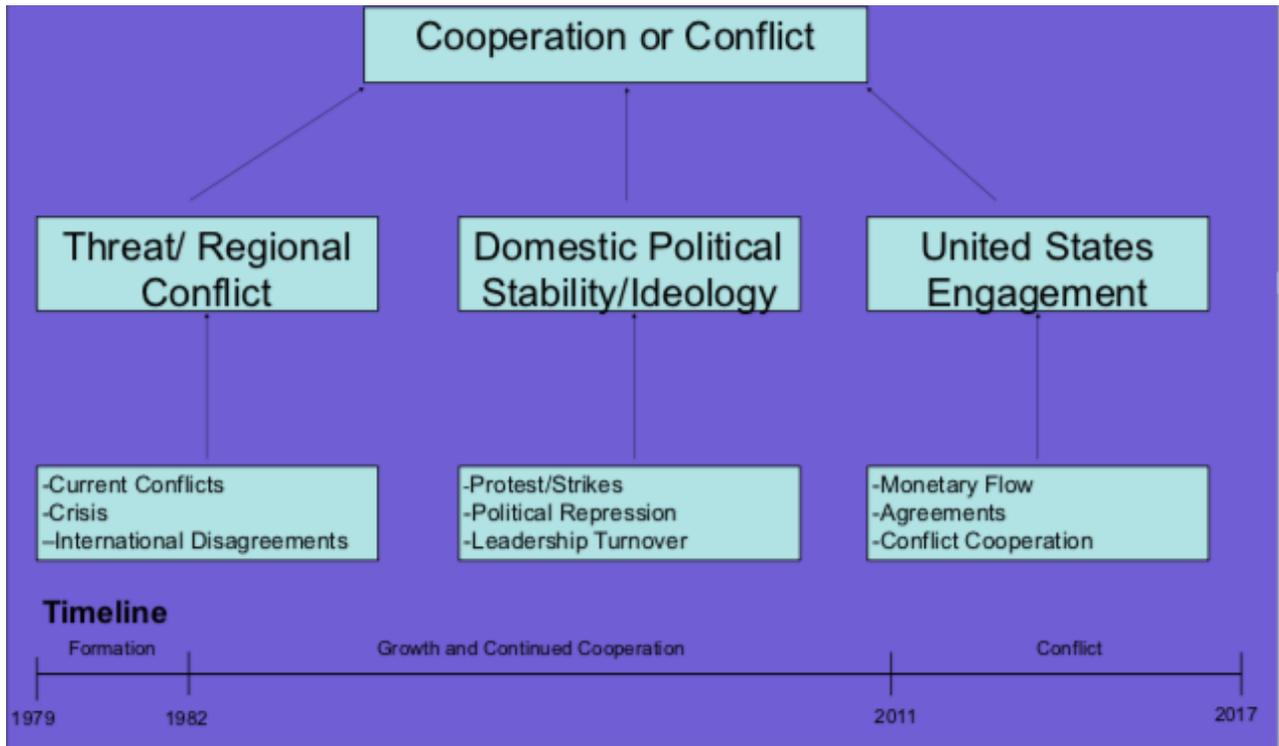
My main strength for answering my research question is dividing the Gulf Cooperation Council into three different case studies and time periods. Since there have been earlier case studies on the GCC, I am expanding and providing other potential factors that may explain their formation. The three different time periods are also important in determining the different factors that apply to alliance theory. Since it is the same alliance, there should not be much variation in the factors that would impact their relationship. It would be more difficult to define these factors if I were looking at three completely different alliances. Ultimately, the end goal of my research is to find different reasons explaining the current crisis between the GCC nations. I find this through alliance theory and the factors that influence an alliance will be used to determine whether the current GCC

should continue to cooperate. If variation occurs between the independent variables over the three case studies, this would give us an alternative to the diplomatic explanation given by the governments involved in this issue. However, if we don't, this could also fill the gap in alliance theory. There are certain characteristics that I am identifying that Walt believed were insufficient to support an alliance and threat is the main characteristic that created an alliance. My analysis of the GCC over time could explain what factors are most important when observing an alliance.

One of the most obvious weakness of my research design has is defining my independent variables, especially internal political stability and culture. Another obvious weakness is that it may be difficult for me to obtain information or data for my independent variables that would explain whether an alliance should be present. However, I overcome this weakness due to the resources presented both by the UConn library and other sources provided by news outlets in these Gulf countries. When looking at information from foreign resources, I have to determine whether it is biased, which would be a problem for testing my argument.

Research and Analysis

1979-1981: Genesis of the GCC

The events that occurred throughout this time period, including regional threat imposed by Iran and Iraq, domestic political instability created by a wave of Shia' uprising and major United States involvement in the Middle East, led to the formation of the GCC. This initial framework will be used for comparing the next two case studies. If there is variation between the independent variable with continued cooperation, this shows the lack of importance that factor has towards this alliance.

Threat/Regional Conflict:

There are multiple events that led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Middle East has experienced a certain degree of conflict since the drawings of current modern states by France and Britain following the first World War. While many believe that the main problem impacting tension in the region stems from the Arab-Israeli conflict, it does not pose an immediate threat to the Gulf States. Other less known events are more significant when analyzing this independent variable. The first main destabilizer occurred in 1979 with the Iranian revolution. This forced the over throw of the Shah, a major ally to the United States and led to the creation of a Shiite Islamic Republic which were at odds with the Gulf countries' Sunni ideology. Preventing its expansion was of the utmost importance to the US and the region to ensure defense and security of the ruling Gulf monarchies. This shows the immediate threat created by a hostile group that gained major support from their victory in Iran. In addition, a new Iranian government was seeking allies to strengthen its regional influence. It found one in Syria, who was looking to expand their foreign policy initiatives. According to Mansour, this gave Iran access to the Arab world and complicated Saudi and Egyptian regional initiatives (Mansour 2008).

In addition to the threat posed by Iran, another border country was posing military risk to the Gulf countries, Iraq. With the new leadership of Saddam Hussein, Iraq was looking to expand eastward and take over strategic oil territory in Iran while reestablishing regional influence. This led to the Iraqi forces invading their eastern neighbor in September 1980, with the goal of a quick victory. However, the war endured for an additional eight years. The Gulf States sided with Iraq at the time since they were forced to pick the lesser of two evils. However, the war still instilled fear in the majority of those countries especially Kuwait, as they believed the war would spill over into their country. These threats created by Iran and Iraq showed the necessity of cooperation

between the Gulf States and is one of the initial catalysts for the foundation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981.

Domestic Political Stability/Ideology:

This is arguably the most difficult variable to measure within the GCC due to the lack of information on public opinion polls and the fear of speaking out against the current monarchies in power. However, certain events give us a general understanding of the domestic political stability and changes in ideologies. In 1979, multiple significant events occurred around the region, including the Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. One that received minimal attention was in Saudi Arabia, where gunmen seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca for over two weeks and over one hundred thousand people were taken hostage. Originally, the U.S. believed that Iranian backed Shiites were behind the attacks, instead, it was the first time where a Sunni Jihadism idea was used to instill fear in the government and the rest of the Islamic world. Osama Bin Laden saw the response from the Saudi Government as "criminal activity" which was one of the factors that sparked the evolvement of this ideology into the terrorist group known as Al-Qaida. This was an embarrassment to the Kingdom as they needed French support to expel the fundamentalist from the Mosque.

This was not the only moment of fear and instability within the Gulf countries. During the same year, a group of Shia protests erupted in the oil rich regions of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has a history of treating the Shia minority in their country as "second-class citizens." Therefore, the discriminated community turn towards Iran's recent Shi'i revolutionary success to legitimize their actions and pushed for more equality for minority groups. Saudi responded to the protest by using force to destroy the rebellions and ensure they don't spread to other parts of the country.

These protests also occurred in Bahrain and Kuwait showing some level of domestic instability within the Gulf countries.

The Gulf States had a stronger communal response to the Shia protests occurring within their countries than they did to the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The monarchies feared having to give up some of their power and therefore, led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council with the goal of promoting their common objectives rooted in similar cultural and political identities. Therefore, in this time period, similar ideology between these nations allowed the countries to cooperate to strengthen domestic stability.

United States Engagement:

Following War World II, the United States becomes one of the most important influences in the Middle East. It has a political and economic reason for being in the region, to prevent the spread of communism and to reap the benefits from the oil rich States. Many countries in the Gulf are benefactors to U.S. economic advancement including Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in the first case study of my research, the United States is extremely involved in Gulf country affairs. As I stated above, their primary worry was the spread of Soviet ideology to the Middle East following their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. They wanted to protect the sovereignties of the monarchies and reap the oil benefits created by establishing a close relationship. Another major factor attributing to the United States' involvement in the Gulf is the fear created by the new Iranian regime, which was much less sympathetic to the Western states and as stated above, looked to spread their ideology across the region.

As we know by now, the ending of this time period led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Having a strong foreign power involved at the foundation of their alliance could potentially have future consequences since it makes these states feel more secure from

outside threat. It also prevents us from understanding the real security success created by the GCC. However, it was also a key factor in promoting cooperation between a group of like-minded nations who could help the United States carry out their political and economic interests in the region.

1982-2011: Cooperation with Minor Conflicts

For the most part, this time period saw further cooperation between the GCC states as they established themselves as a legitimate alliance in the region. There were many opportunities for them to show their capabilities while facing direct threats. However, following 1992 they faced a brief period of tranquility, this gave rise to diplomatic issues between member states and helps validate Walt's balance of threat theory. When this was missing, members states were more willing to pursue their own interests, whether in securing territory or settling domestic disputes, creating tension between them.

Similar ideologies between member states furthered cooperation as they assisted each other in preventing the spread of Shia' throughout their countries, this is similar to the first time period and is consistent throughout the whole second case study. Although there continued to be large American involvement, the nature of it changed following the invasion of Iraq. Instead of providing security to the block, their actions created a threat that forced the GCC to increase cooperation. My research shows that all types of US intervention improves their alliance.

Threat/Regional Conflict:

As the Iran-Iraq war continued, the Gulf countries faced the immediate military and domestic-destabilizing threat from the two countries. This increased immensely when Iran turned to the offensive by attacking international ships and breaking through Iraq's defense, which brought them closer to the Kuwaiti border. The war came to an end when Iraq regained defensive control, preventing Iran from gaining enough territory to claim a decisive victory. They accepted

the United Nations resolution to a ceasefire in 1988, which also provided Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab river, achieving one of Hussein's initial objectives in invading Iran at the beginning of the war.

The end of the war provided the Gulf states with a greater sense of security, since Iran was defeated, and their army was expelled from Iraq. It no longer posed an immediate border threat to Kuwait. Iraq gained the territory that it initially desired which made it less aggressive towards the rest of the region. This, in addition to the GCC countries' support towards Iraq during their war against Iran, diminished the threat they originally posed against their Southern neighbors. However, this feeling was short lived when Iraq invaded and annexed neighboring Kuwait in 1990. This put Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf countries in an uncomfortable position since they seemed unable to protect themselves and their GCC ally from Iraqi aggression. The rest of the Arab countries denounced the invasion however, refused to form a joint coalition to push Hussein's army out of Kuwait. GCC countries had an obligation to promoting and ensuring each other's sovereignty, leading to a separate statement allowing foreign intervention. This contradicted the rest of the Arab world as they stated, "the clause which rejected foreign intervention did not apply to adherence to collective international measures endorsed by the United Nations, since the Arab League Charter commits members to UN resolution" (Lesch 1991: 36). To ensure their security, they looked to the United States for military support.

This example shows the necessity of collaboration between the Gulf Cooperation Council members facing a stronger power. The direct threat posed by Iraq in occupying one of the Gulf countries forced the others into greater cooperation. This led to them seeking further assistance from foreign allies to alleviate the threat and free Kuwait. This also gave rise to the Gulf War

which led to greater United States involvement in the region, this will be important when analyzing the third independent variable's impact on the GCC alliance.

At the end of the Gulf war, direct threat from regional powers decreased. The size and power of both Iran and Iraq were diminished, which forced them to focus on internal state stability. Although the lack of war from regional countries created a certain degree of security for the GCC, Iran created a new type of threat that is still relevant today. They were seeking assistance from foreign nations to help build a nuclear arsenal that was abandoned after the revolution. This weapon could be used as a coercive tactic to spread their influence throughout the Middle East and threaten their Gulf neighbors. The United States attempted to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons by pressuring potential suppliers to limit cooperation. The nature of this threat was developing and makes it difficult to analyze whether it had a significant positive or negative impact on GCC cooperation.

With the lack of a direct threat facing the GCC states, there appeared to be an increase in internal tension, especially between Qatar and Bahrain over the Hawar islands. This was a territorial dispute that dated 65 years but reached a new level of struggle in 1995 when the two sides were at the brink of war. This dispute was eventually settled in 2001 by the International Court of Justice instead of the neighboring GCC states, who refused to play a role in the conflict. (Wiegand 2012) This is an interesting example that shows how the lack of a direct external threat decreased the likelihood of cooperation between the Gulf States. A lack of involvement escalated the conflict which implies that the countries were unwilling to stand for the security of all Gulf states. With the help of the council, cooperation could have prevented escalation and settled the dispute diplomatically. Since the territorial dispute had no impact on the other GCC members, they were not inclined to help mediate the situation.

In 2003, President Bush told the United States people that Saddam Hussein held weapons of mass destruction that were an immediate threat to US interests in the region, he also believed the Iraqi government had ties to terrorism. This led to the overthrow of Hussein which created a power vacuum in the country. Although the GCC expressed their concerns for such a situation, they backed the United States due to their historical alliance in exchange for regional security. The main concern for the Gulf States is that the invasion would lead to an imbalance of power in the region between Iraq and Iran. A toppled Iraq gave the Shia majority in the country an opportunity to come to power with Iranian aid. This was a direct risk to Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC monarchies as it gave hope to Shia populations living in those countries for greater authority in the future. According to Cetinoglu "U.S. led invasion of Iraq and the consequences of this second Gulf war have encouraged the GCC member states to intensify their relations within this organization and to act as a united body" (Cetinoglu 2010: 91). This shows the importance of regional threat for increasing cooperation within the GCC states to protect themselves from potential Iranian influence in Iraq and the rest of the region. The final US troops left Iraq in 2011 however, the country is still susceptible to outside influence due to its poor governmental structure. The instability and the geographical proximity of these countries continues to be a threat to the GCC.

Domestic Political Stability/Ideology:

There continued to be many Shia uprisings which were major risks towards internal stability in the Gulf States. The Iranian regime at the time promoted Shia opposition to the monarchies, especially in areas with larger Shia populations, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait. Their main argument for this support was the inability of Saudi Arabia to properly play the role of custodian over the two holiest cities in Islam. The most prominent uprisings occurred in Bahrain, where the Sunni monarchy was ruling a Shia majority in the country. Iranian backed

groups attempted to assassinate high level Bahraini royals and take over television and radio communication to more effectively spread their propaganda in support of overthrowing the government at the time. These continued into the 1990s where the Iranian government would recruit Bahraini Shiite to destabilize the local monarchy, this included training and the transfer of arms to carry out Iranian influence in the Gulf country. Due to the potential spread of Shia ideology into the rest of the Gulf region, neighboring states were quick to help the Bahraini government in overcoming these uprisings and ensuring political stability. The potential spread of different ideologies forced greater cooperation within the region to protect the monarchies in power who shared similar objectives.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, a wave of democratization occurred in much of Eastern Europe. This had an influence on Saudi Arabia's internal policy, as they attempted to fix their image of a government with strict control over its citizens. In order to solve this problem, the Kingdom founded the Consultative Council in 1993 whose goal was to "serve the public interests, and shall preserve the unity of the community, the entity of the State and the interest of the Nation." The council consists of 60 members that are chosen by the King; however, they were supposed to be seen as an independent body from the government on the international stage. This was clearly not the case until 2004 when further pressure from the United States forced the government to grant the council the right to propose legislation without the consent of the King.

Further change occurred when newly-crowned king Abdullah announced he would lay the foundation for a modern city in 2005 that will resemble those of the west. The city included a financial center, luxury resort, and was supposed to be an area to improve domestic education. These ideas of a new liberal city created a lot of backlash from the elite who were more traditionally conservative. It is interesting to see the strong cohesion between the Gulf countries

during this time period of domestic instability. The Rand corporation argues "a shared monarchical identity brings the GCC together, whereas sensitivities over sovereignty pull it apart." These sensitivities do not seem to include democratic values instead, it merely focuses on Islam and the differing Shia' ideology. The promotion of democracy across the region instead became a key factor towards cooperation, since states seemed to have come together in their shared "monarchical identity" instead of being pulled apart by Western ideology.

United States Engagement:

During the 1980s, the United States continued to be highly involved with the Gulf countries by supporting them during the Iran-Iraq war. However, there were many issues that were vital to the people of the GCC that the US either avoided or sided against. Due to the high number of foreign nationals from Palestine or Lebanon in the region, the GCC had personal ties to the Palestine-Israeli conflict and the Lebanese Civil War. The United States' inability to act in favor of the marginalized groups in both conflicts, created discontent towards the government's relationship with one of the world's superpowers. However, this sentiment was briefly forgotten following the US response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. They immediately pursued authorization from the United Nations security council to retaliate with the use of force in Iraq. A commitment by the US to ensure Kuwaiti protection was endorsed by the GCC countries three years prior to the invasion, this explains the actions to ensure the sovereignty of the Gulf monarchy. The roughly $77 billion spent on the war highlights the extent to which the US was committed to securing their freedom. This changed the minds of many GCC citizens who were uncertain about their relationship towards the U.S.

Following the Gulf war of 1990, greater economic relationship occurs between the GCC and the United States. Many dialogues between representatives from both the Private and Public

sector of the parties involved led to positive outcomes which would shape the future of these partnerships. They served for multiple purposes including "to narrow misunderstandings, eliminate barriers to trade and investment, enhance the alignment of their respective systems of standards, weights, and measures, and in general strengthen the foundation for future cooperation and the generation of wealth in their respective private sectors" (Anthony 2006: 16).

In addition to economic cooperation, they looked to decrease the military threat facing the region including United States interests. What originally was built as a secret military base in 1996, was later used during the US operations in Afghanistan in 2001. The Al-Udeid military base in Qatar would end up becoming the most important base to carry out US missions in the region. The deployed regional headquarters of US central command would be moved to Qatar from Saudi Arabia. This showed signs of early competition for foreign weapons sales between the two Gulf countries since they felt the U.S. would rely on one country more than the other. The 1990s were a period of extensive cooperation between these nations, it continued in the beginning of the 2000's in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack on US territory. The Gulf states were critical in the American led intervention against the Taliban government in Afghanistan. However, as stated above, the US invasion of Iraq pushed the GCC into further cooperation, since it gave Iran the opportunity to influence a direct neighbor, creating a threat to the Gulf. This is the first time we see the United States creating a threat, which ends up having a positive impact on the cooperation.

Heavy United States involvement in Gulf countries have led to further cooperation between them. This is due to both positive and negative impacts they have on the region as a whole. The economic benefit and security blanket provided by the Western state makes the Gulf stronger and more willing to cooperate between each other. Competition for wealth in the region is less important when the US is trading with the alliance as a whole. On the other hand, the United States

clearly created a power vacuum in Iraq which gave Iran the opportunity to fill it. This would be an immediate threat to the GCC alliance and therefore, force them into further cooperation. However, US involvement in the region also prevents GCC states from growing their influence and creating conflicts of interests between them. This issue will come about in the next time period due to a change in US involvement.

2011-2017: Leading up to the conflict

This time period highlights the events leading up to the conflict. The most interesting take away is that there continues to be threat facing the GCC, however, the nature of the threat has differed from the first time period. The Gulf is no longer facing a direct military threat from the likes of Iran or Iraq. They face an indirect threat created by the Arab Spring that wouldn't have an immediate negative impact on their security. This allows them to pursue foreign political interests, which happen to be at odds between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Making conflict more likely in the absence of an immediate threat.

The countries ideologies are supposed to be the same and have not changed throughout this case study. However, domestic political stability is extremely low, having a secondary negative impact on the alliance. Another variation is found in the US involvement, there was significantly less, creating a power vacuum in the region. Qatar and Saudi Arabia took advantage of this by spreading their influence across multiple conflicts. These were often times opposing interests, creating further tension between these states and ultimately leading to the 2017 GCC crisis.

Threat/Regional Conflict:

It is important to highlight the immediate threat facing the GCC up to this time period, as they become less direct and led to different responses by the Gulf countries. Although it appears that Iraqi stability was critical in preventing Iranian influence and ultimately decreasing any threat

facing the GCC, other events occurred following the US invasion that had a broader impact on the Middle East. In 2011, many pro-democracy uprisings began throughout the region, this event is also known as the Arab Spring. It impacted countries outside the GCC, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria. However, was also present in Bahrain, a member of the alliance. The democratic revolution succeeded in Tunisia and Egypt at the time however, in the rest of the region, it was viewed as a failure which led to more instability including the eight-year Syrian civil war.

The GCC members had two ways of responding to this regional instability, initially it brought the countries closer in cooperation as Saudi Arabia viewed it as a threat to regional security. They offered a $20 billion in assistance to Omar and Bahrain to help these countries face the risk created by the uprising. However, this has also given the Gulf countries an opportunity to spread their influence in many of these contest environments. One country that took advantage of this opportunity is Qatar. As the smallest country in the Gulf, it holds a great deal of independence due to their close relationship with dueling states in the region. They seem to be one of the only Gulf countries who supported the Arab popular uprising while helping groups in Syria, Libya and Egypt. They also set a positive narrative for the Arab uprising through Al-Jazeera, a Qatari based media network. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is often portrayed as the country advocating for the status quo and ultimately against these popular uprisings. The Kingdom feared that those demands would spread to their country and threaten their monarchy. Carnegie think tank explained that these differing opinions stem from an uncertain regional balance of power created by the Arab Spring. This is the first time throughout the 30-year alliance that foreign opportunity takes precedence over the threat facing the Gulf Cooperation Council. However, these threats are different than those in the other case studies.

Domestic Political Stability/Ideology:

Domestic stability continued to be vulnerable due to continue United States support for a democratic agenda in the region. This was an ideological threat to the Gulf states especially with their attempt at regime change, which was evident in Iraq. Stability reached an all-time low during the period of the Arab Spring, where the monarchies feared that popular uprisings would take place in their countries and they would ultimately lose power to the people. This seemed to be more relevant in Bahrain where they experienced a history of popular uprising by the Shia majority. Most of the countries, except for Qatar, had a negative outlook towards the Arab Spring and wanted to counter it as quickly as possible to prevent the spread into their Kingdoms. This is the first time where we see domestic instability creating friction between the Gulf countries. There was no longer a cohesive ideology of protecting the monarchies at all cost as Qatar seemed to have veered from this to support the popular uprisings throughout the region. They began supporting opposition groups in foreign countries and often had counterproductive ideology and power struggles with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, further forcing the rich Gulf state closer to Iran and Turkey.

In response to the Arab Spring and US pressure for democratic values in the region, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman conducted reforms trying to highlight the progressive approach taken by the Saudi government. He accused thirty of Saudi Arabia's most senior figures; many related to the royal family, of corruption and made them all prisoners in a Ritz-Carlton hotel. Although this seemed like a positive step for the country, many argued that if these charges were true, a normal individual would be sentenced immediately and be put in jail instead of a five-star resort. In addition, he gave a decree giving the women the right to drive which was hailed as a historic accomplishment across the world.

These changes appear to be moving the country in a more liberal direction, however, it has caused backlash with the political elite and ultimately backfired. Women activists are still being imprisoned and the most recent death of critical Saudi journalist, Jamaal Khashoggi, highlights the inability to freely criticize the Kingdom. During this time period, the GCC relationship has taken a turn for the worst and led to its recent diplomatic crisis. The change in ideology between member states that began with the Arab Spring, is one of the factors leading to the downfall of the alliance. Instead of fixing this alliance, Saudi Arabia focused on their internal instability by trying to promote change from the elite, instead of by popular demand. This new counter-uprising ideology brought them closer with members like the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. On the other hand, Qatar established themselves as the country supporting the uprisings, which allowed them to cooperate more with Turkey. These difference between the Saudi Arabian and Qatari circles alienated Qatar from the rest of the GCC.

United States Engagement:

When it was discovered that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which was one of President Bush's main reason for the war, quick backlash by the American people forced policy makers to rethink their plan towards the Middle East. This led to a withdrawal of troops from Iraq, fully completed in 2011, which would pose a threat to the GCC allies since it would create a power vacuum that needed to be filled. This made the group of monarchies believe that the US was uninterested in the security of the region. In addition to their withdrawal, the US also decreased aid to Saudi Arabia from 2006-2011 due to poor democratic conditions shown by the Kingdom. The poor policy decisions made by the United States in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, prevented them from being able or willing to force regional order. Therefore, the

United States' role following the Presidencies of Obama and Trump have decreased tremendously in the region, due to fear of being blamed for further instability.

Another major reason for the lack of US attention to the Gulf is the threat created by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. By focusing most of their resources on the war on terror, it allowed for other countries with poor relationship to the Gulf states, including Iran, Russia and Turkey, to influence the region. Recently, President Trump went as far as saying the US will pull out most of their troops from Iraq and Syria which will negatively impact the balance of power in the region. This balance eventually needs to be filled; this is where conflicting opinions occur between the GCC states while they are trying to exert their influence in many of these conflicts. Saudi Arabia tried to portray themselves as the regional hegemon, while supporting anti-revolutionary groups following the Arab Spring. While many believe their main adversary to be Iran in these conflicts, it is often forgotten that Qatar has conflicting interests as they support groups that are deemed detrimental to Saudi influence, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and opposition groups in Syria and Yemen. The US involvement, although still active economically, decreased militarily which had a negative impact on the relationship between members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Although, it increased the threat facing these countries, it also allowed them to venture and spread their ideologies to unstable countries following the Arab Spring. This led to a conflict of interests between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in Egypt's government, and in the civil wars of Syria and Yemen where they support different factions in these conflicts.

Conclusion/Implication

Understanding the rise, sustainability and downfall of the GCC provided substantial credibility to Walt's balance of threat theory, while also filing in gaps when threat was not applicable. My research provides a framework for analyzing the status of current alliances and also

predicting future ones. It is important to state that not one single independent variable was the sole reason for the GCC formation, maintenance and disbandment; different factors attributed to these outcomes over time. This is something that scholars of Alliance theory fail to do as they often focus on their theory without including other factors that have an impact on the outcome (Walt 1985, Schweller 1994). This is inevitable in the Middle East where many different circumstances occur that have an impact on alliances. However, I argue that there is a hierarchy of importance among these different variables when trying to predict whether countries will cooperate or conflict with each other.

Throughout my research, there was always a threat facing the Gulf states, whether it be a direct military, ideological, or militant threat. However, it is important to characterize them since they had a different impact on cooperation and conflict. The first and most important is a direct military risk at one of their borders, which threatens the monarchies of all member States. As the examples above show, the response by the Gulf countries is alliance formation when facing the threat of the Iran-Iraq war. There is even further cooperation when Iraq annexed Kuwait. This theory is in line with Walt's theory that countries would balance themselves against a rising threat in the region.

Furthermore, the countries faced many indirect threats that had the potential of spreading to their own governments. However, these cases involved only certain members of the alliance which can negatively impact their cooperation. In this case, I argue that Schweller's balance of interests' theory applies, since they have a greater impact on the alliance than the threat towards these countries. Because of the threat created by the Arab Spring, Qatar decided to take on the opportunity of spreading their influence to advance their interests in the region. Schweller would describe them as Jackals since they are willing to spend high costs to both promote their interest

and protect their belongings. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, would be viewed as Lions, as they are determined to protect their ideologies and stick to the status quo. Another example that highlights a lack of direct threat allowing countries to promote their own interests is shown in the Bahrain - Qatar conflict over land dispute. In the absence of risk, these countries were more willing to advance their interest. We also see that because it did not impact all the countries in the alliance, others were reluctant to step in and mediate the situation. These differing interests of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are one of the main factors for the current crisis. It pushed Saudi Arabia to become closer with similar interests' countries like the UAE and Bahrain, while Qatar became closer with Turkey and other non-state actors in the region.

The importance of United States' involvement must not be underestimated in this alliance. Walt argues that foreign engagement was not necessary for alliance formation but instead made existing alliances stronger. However, my research on the United States' status in the region contradicts his claim. In the first two time periods, which show alliance formation and maintenance, their presence in the region was extremely important to security and stability of the GCC. They protected them from larger foreign powers and created opportunities for economic growth within their countries. The US played a larger role in the balance of power in the region and ultimately suppressed the GCC countries' ambition to seek new interests and spread their influence throughout the region. Therefore, the role played by the foreign power was critical in the formation and maintenance of the alliance. Throughout the years, as its role diminished, Gulf States looked to replace this balance with their own interests. These were sometimes conflicting and therefore, led to further conflict between the States. Although, the lack of US involvement may not have directly led to their downfall, it indirectly left a void in the region that was filled by opposing interests of the GCC states.

Finally, ideology and domestic political stability are significant when looking at the maintenance of alliances. Initially, the GCC States described similar ideologies as being one of the most important factors for coming together. However, it was mostly significant when used against the threat created by the opposing Shia ideology. Therefore, without the actual threat facing a government, it would not have a significant impact on the alliance. This coincides with what Walt's argument that similar ideologies play a secondary role when analyzing cooperation. However, it is interesting to see how opposing ideologies can create such strong threat to the internal government and ultimately strengthen the cooperation between countries. This is seen throughout the majority of the alliance, when the risk created by domestic instability forced the GCC to further assist each other to protect their monarchies. Instead of arguing that similar ideologies create better alliances, the threat of an opposing ideology forces cohesion to protect their sovereignty.

All these factors are important when looking at alliance theory. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to predict the status of future alliances due to the many factors that need to be taken into account. My goal for this project is to show that there is an order of importance between these different variables. The first and most significant is that countries will come together or maintain an alliance if a direct threat is facing every country involved. Second, if there is no direct threat to each of the States, they are more likely to pursue their interests in the region which could be contradicting as seen in the events following the Arab Spring, leading to conflict between Qatar and the other Gulf countries. Third, is the importance of outside influence at the initial formation of the alliance since they can play a larger role in security then one might expect. Once the foreign actor disappears, it gives the opportunity for others in the region to fill the void in the balance of power. Finally, the least significant is similar ideologies and domestic stability; differing viewpoints that create a threat to internal stability creates more cohesion between countries with

similar government structures and ideology. However, this is not essential for alliance formation as it mainly plays a larger role for further cooperation.

This is an important conflict to solve since stability in the Middle East is important for the United States to advance their political agenda in the region. With two civil wars occurring (Syria and Yemen) and continued conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, the United States have depended on the stability of the Gulf Cooperation Council over the past 38 years. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are two countries we depend on most after Israel. Saudi Arabia's presence in multiple countries decreases Iran's influence and we use land in Qatar for the Al-Udeid Military base, this is key to the United States' war on terror in the region. Therefore, after conducting extensive research on the history of this alliance, I argue that greater support by the United States towards the Gulf countries will prevent them from seeking external opportunities and advancing their own interests, which is one of the main reasons for conflict within the GCC. This is more reliable and in the best interest of the United States instead of waiting for the rise of an immediate threat facing the Gulf countries to force them into cooperation.

Not only is this an important issue for Middle East stability, it also brings light to other alliances that are facing their own difficulties. There have been multiple statements by the President of the United States that it is no longer necessary to be involved in NATO, he has repeatedly stated his willingness to pull out of the security block. Although, there is currently no direct military threat from Russia (there may be one in the near future), we still hold similar interests than the rest of our NATO allies, including spreading democracy and Western values, and preventing Russia from returning to their Cold War status. These are sufficient reasons to continue this alliance, interests should be considered and analyzed with a lack of direct threat.

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