

SPEAKER

F. Gregory Gause III is one of the leading scholars of Gulf foreign policy in the United States. Gause is an associate professor of political science at the University of Vermont, and director of the University's Middle East Studies Program. He was previously on the faculty of Columbia University (1987–1995) and was Fellow for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (1993–1994). Gause has published two books on Gulf security and foreign policy: *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994) and *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (Columbia University Press, 1990). His scholarly articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Security Studies*, *Middle East Journal*, *Washington Quarterly*, *Journal of International Affairs*, *Review of International Studies*, and in other journals and edited volumes. He received his B.A. from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. ■

THE ARAB QUARTET

The re-launching of the “Arab Peace Initiative” at March’s Arab League Summit was accompanied by an innovation: the creation of an “Arab Quartet” to help pursue peace efforts between the Arab world and Israel. Professor F. Gregory Gause III, an expert on the foreign policies of the Gulf states and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Vermont, analyzed the development at the inaugural session of CSIS’s Gulf Roundtable.

Gause argued that the Arab Quartet’s creation was a consequence of two factors. The first was a Western desire to create an Arab counterpart for the international Quartet on Arab-Israeli issues (comprised of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations). The second was that it brought together two important sets of actors in the Arab world. Egypt and Jordan have the necessary diplomatic history and legal framework to speak publicly with the Israelis, but because they have already made their peace with Israel, they are somewhat at odds with Arab public opinion. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have not concluded such a peace, and as such they provide important cover for Arab public opinion.

But Gause wondered openly what the Quartet actually represents. To date it has met only once, when U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked to meet with its members during a trip to the Middle East. Gause suggested that the Quartet may be part of an effort by Arab governments to create an array of tools and approaches that leaders can draw on in the future. In that way, he suggested, the Arab governments are creating a standing group of governments because there may come a time when a smaller group taking collective action can be more effective than all of the Arab states acting on consensus, or individual Arab states acting alone. So far, he pointed out, its members have taken action individually, but no strong concerted action has yet emerged from the group.

In addition, Gause stressed that the Arab Quartet means different things to different members. For Egypt and Jordan, it consolidates the leadership role they see themselves occupying in the Arab world, a role that declined after their own peace treaties with Israel. For the United Arab Emirates, support for the Arab Quartet gives them a higher regional profile, and is in line with the Emirates’ traditional desire—often articulated by the late Sheikh Zayed—to follow up on Arab resolutions with concrete measures. For the Saudis, however, the Arab Quartet is an important tool through which they seek to manage relations with Iran and its

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THE GULF ROUNDTABLE SERIES

The CSIS Middle East Program launched the Gulf Roundtable in April, 2007 to examine the strategic importance of a broad range of social, political, and economic trends in the Gulf region and to identify opportunities for constructive U.S. engagement. The roundtable defines the Gulf as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran. The roundtable convenes monthly, assembling a diverse group of regional experts, policymakers, academics, and business leaders seeking to build a greater understanding of the complexities of the region. Topics for discussion include the role of Islamist movements in politics, the war on terror, democratization and the limits of civil society, the strategic importance of Gulf energy, media trends, trade liberalization, and prospects for greater regional integration. ■

surrogates.

Gause suggested that Saudi Arabia is worried by the political threat Iran poses to Saudi influence in the Gulf. Contrary to much of the rhetoric surrounding a sectarian Sunni-Shi'a confrontation in the Middle East, the Saudis see the Iranian challenge in pure political terms. Saudi Arabia is not seeking a direct confrontation with Iran, however. Instead, the Kingdom is developing a matrix of tools intended to contain Iran's power in Iraq while simultaneously rolling back its position in the Levant.

Gause suggested that the Saudi determination to move forward on Arab-Israeli peace is part of this effort. By creating tangible progress in Arab-Israeli negotiations, they hope to make "Iranian rejectionists less salient" among Arab publics. Gause stated that concerted activity on the "Arab Initiative" for Arab-Israeli peace could help lay the groundwork for peace in the longer term, by providing political cover for Arabs seeking accommodation with Israel. Even so, Gause judged the possibility of a settlement remote, given the weakness of both the Israeli and Palestinian political leaderships.

Gause argued that a near-term settlement is unlikely especially because of Palestinian political weakness. Although the Saudis are ready to sign off on the wording of any resolution on any compromise on Palestinian refugees that is acceptable to the Palestinians, they remain unwilling to publicly leap ahead of the Palestinians on it. At most, Gause suggested that the Saudis could play an important role prodding Hamas to stand aside while the negotiations over the refugee issue occur, but he admitted their the Saudis success in doing so would be far from certain

Gause stressed that the Iranian threat takes precedence for Saudi Arabia over any political process with the Israelis. Even the recently concluded "Mecca Agreement," which established a Palestinian unity government, was intended more to sway Hamas away from Iran than it was to move forward on Arab-Israeli peace. Although Gause stated that he had seen no indication that the Saudis have made any headway moving Hamas away from Iran, he warned it would be difficult to tell because such a process would be so subtle that it wouldn't become apparent until the effects were already obvious.

Gause also argued that the Saudis have been distracted on this in part by events in Iraq, which represents their most immediate foreign policy challenge. He presented the double challenge for Saudi Arabia posed by the Sunni insurgency and the Iranians: on the one hand the Saudis do not want to fund a Sunni insurgency that might end up killing Americans or turn against the Saudi government, but on the other hand they do not want Iran

to control Iraq. Yet in all of this, Gause argued that three principles continue to define Saudi foreign policy: 1) not getting too far from the United States; 2) not getting in front of the Arab consensus and avoiding grand gestures; and 3) limiting or rolling back Iranian power where possible.

While Arab governments seem relatively united in their desire to limit Iranian influence, Gause sees Arab public opinion significantly more divided. In particular, Arab publics admire the way in which the Iranian president has stood up to the United States, and they like the idea of ending Israel's nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. States have tried to respond, in part by fanning stories of Shia proselytization that raise sectarian fears. Gause views the emerging rhetoric and propaganda warning Arab publics of this proselytization and the Iranian export of revolution as a way for Arab leaders to create the political space necessary to balance the Iranian threat. Most stories in that vein remain little more than rumor or occasional anecdote though. Gause also pointed to a recent interview with King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia in which he suggested that the overwhelming Sunni demographic majority ensured that conversion to Shi'ism was not a serious threat.

Gause concluded the roundtable by reviewing the Gulf's recent history of engagement with the Levant and presented the obstacles that the Arab Quartet will have to overcome before achieving tangible results. He argued that since the Gulf War, the Gulf states have been actively involved on the Arab-Israeli front with a brief hiatus following the collapse of the peace process in 2000. Rather than viewing current Gulf initiatives as completely new, they should be understood within the context of a diplomatic history that in the 1990s established numerous direct contacts and trade offices between the Gulf states and Israel. ■ GB

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The Quartet may be part of an Arab effort to create a "toolbox" of options and approaches that leaders can draw on in the future.

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