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The Impact of the Arab Spring on Africa: Gulf Cooperation Council Engagement with Africa

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December 2012
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IDA Document D-4826
H 13-000370

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About this Publication

This work was conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) under contract 2012-12062700-003, Global Coverage Analyses Program. The views, opinions, and findings should not be construed as representing the official position of the U.S. Government.

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Executive Summary

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – are actively engaged in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. African trade with the GCC has increased significantly over the past three decades and the GCC countries are making significant investments in such sectors as agriculture, resources, telecommunications, and tourism. And although the magnitude of the economic and humanitarian assistance that they provide compares unfavorably to what they provide to their Arab neighbors or to Chinese assistance to Africa, aid from the GCC states collectively touches a large number of African countries and is significant for a smaller set of countries. Reflecting historic Arab trade and religious ties to the continent, GCC states have to a significant degree focused their aid, investment, and diplomatic engagement on a sub-set of African states with significant Muslim populations in the north and east – countries such as Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya. At the same time, because economic motivations and means are important to GCC engagement in the region, its portfolio of interest also extends to a somewhat broader set of African states, including Ethiopia, Seychelles, and South Africa, where specific economic interests are at stake.

While coordination amongst the GCC states is evident in some areas (e.g., the provision of development assistance), much GCC activity in the region is driven by specific national roles and objectives.

- Saudi Arabia exercises the lead in engaging African populations and nations on issues bearing on the propagation of Islam, although Kuwait and the UAE also support various types of religious charity, such as funding for religious education and construction of mosques.
- With "food security" as a major element of its national security agenda, Saudi Arabia has also taken the lead in making agricultural investments in such locales as Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia. Among the GCC states, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE are also actively engaged in agricultural investments.
- Although Kuwait has generally taken a low profile in its engagement, it provided the greatest amount of development assistance to Africa – more than $1 billion – during the 2005-2011 timeframe and is taking the lead on behalf of the Arab League in hosting the next Arab-Africa summit in 2013.

- In the diplomatic arena, Qatar – as it has done elsewhere in the world – has carved out a role for itself as a trusted mediator in African conflicts. While its many years of engagement in the Darfur conflict and the Djibouti-Eritrea border dispute have not resulted in resolution of the underlying issues in these conflicts, Doha's role is acknowledged and appears to be appreciated.
- While the GCC states have not been big players in the defense and security arena, the UAE has taken the lead for the Gulf nations in supporting international efforts to address the challenge of Somali-based international piracy – hosting international meetings and providing financial support to counter-piracy efforts by the Seychelles and forces within Somalia.
- The roles of Bahrain and Oman in Africa have been much more limited – with, for example, Bahrain providing humanitarian assistance to Somalia and Oman engaging South Africa on maritime security.

Given the important roles that the GCC countries played in the Arab Spring, the ferment that continues in the Middle East and North Africa has the potential to alter future Gulf engagement with Africa, but it is unclear at this point how GCC policies toward Africa will evolve. That said, it is possible to identify several broad drivers that could affect their future profile in Africa.

- Instability in the Middle East and North Africa could result in more GCC focus on matters closer to home. Ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Syria and the potential for instability in such venues as Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon could narrow GCC states' field of policy vision significantly. For example, a recent public estimate suggests that some $60 billion will be needed for reconstruction and development when the conflict in Syria is over. GCC states will be asked to fund a significant portion of that bill.
- Continuing – and potentially even more widespread instability – in the Western Sahel could result in an even greater willingness by the GCC states to assist in helping to stabilize governments in Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, nations where the GCC states have historically provided significant aid. The continuing flood of arms out of Libya might also prove to be a catalyst for greater engagement if some of those arms begin to show up in such Gulf nations as Bahrain.
- In the wake of the fall of Qadhafi, who was the Arab leader most actively engaged in Africa, there is some potential for a revitalization of multilateral engagement between organizations such as the Arab League and the African Union. While any heightened multilateral engagement is unlikely to have a dramatic short-term impact, it could help nudge the GCC states to become more strategic and committed in their engagement in Africa over the longer term.

- While currently improbable, a significant decline in Africa's appeal as an investment venue could reduce GCC interest in economic engagement with the continent. While it would be difficult for these countries to walk away from their fixed investments in areas such as agriculture, they would have ample opportunities for future investment in other parts of the world.
- Although the motivations of the GCC for engagement in Africa give low priority toward countering the influence of other external players, it is likely that they would be sensitive to signs that Iran is gaining significantly greater influence in the region. Outside of Sudan, there is, however, little evidence that Tehran is positioned to achieve significant levels of influence in Africa despite President Ahmadinejad's grandiose rhetoric about building Iran's African ties.

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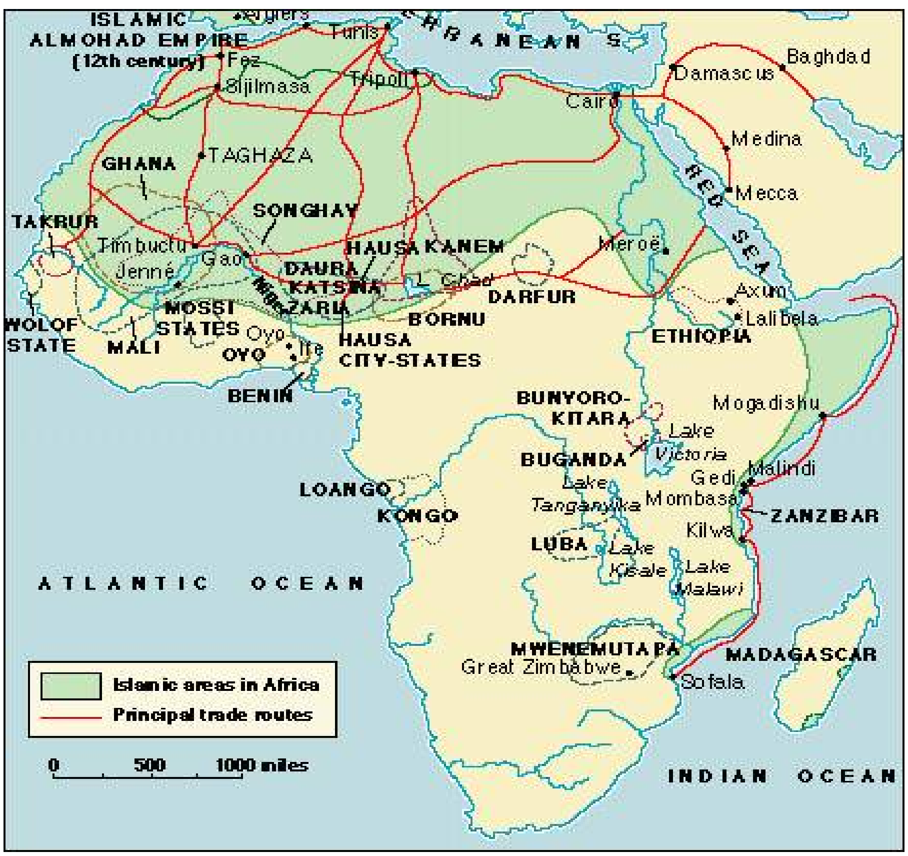
Gulf Cooperation Council Engagement with Africa

While the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – have given the highest priority to engaging nations in their immediate neighborhood and to the United States, Europe, and Asia, these nations collectively have also been actively involved in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The drivers of this interaction are diverse, but have significant historic and economic components.

- Historic trade routes, political entanglements, and the spread of Islam in Africa (see map) provide the broad foundation upon which current GCC interaction is based. While these trade routes no longer have the same economic importance that they once had, significant religious and cultural links remain. Oman's historical ties to Zanzibar and the Swahili coast that date back to the late 1600s are but one example of the historical legacy that still shapes interaction between the two regions.



- Reflecting these longstanding ties, 23 African countries are currently members of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The role of Saudi Arabia in hosting the annual Hajj pilgrimages for African Muslims is a concrete manifestation of those religious linkages. Gulf economic engagement – aid, trade, and investment – in sub-Saharan Africa tends to give priority to countries with significant Muslim populations.
- Although the Gulf countries tend to invest heavily in and trade the most with Asia and the nations of the developed world, Africa has attracted Gulf interest in expanding economic ties. Gulf objectives in the economic arena are diverse: ranging from taking advantage of the continent's agricultural potential to help the Gulf countries in their "food security" to developing joint ventures with South African firms to take advantage their more advanced industrial and financial capabilities.
- While the Gulf states' engagement in African security issues is less significant than in the economic arena, they are engaged in several areas. The September 2012 meeting of the OIC, for example, highlighted as areas of particular concern the continuing potential for instability in Côte d'Ivoire, the seizure of northern Mali by extremists, the need for a peaceful agreement between Sudan and South Sudan, and political and security developments in Somalia.[1] While the Gulf states have to date played a negligible role in Côte d'Ivoire, they have been active in these other regions. Of particular concern to the UAE has been the threat of piracy emanating from Somalia.

The various economic and political changes that have emerged from the Arab Spring might encourage the leaderships of the Gulf nations to adjust their postures toward Africa. On the one hand, the turmoil resulting from the Arab Spring has already resulted in enhanced Gulf support to some of these nations, such as Egypt, raising the possibility that Gulf attention to sub-Saharan Africa might be reduced. On the other hand, instability in the African states that border North Africa could yield greater attention as they seek to help stabilize those governments. Definitive signs are not evident at this juncture, and it is likely that Gulf states' policies toward Africa will evolve over time.

Supporting the Propagation of the Faith

Efforts to engage the Islamic faithful in sub-Saharan Africa and promote conservative interpretations of Islam are an inextricable component of GCC countries' African engagement. Although Saudi Arabia, whose King is designated as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, is the primary player in these efforts, Kuwait and the UAE are also active. Regardless of the country or organization, specific information about *dawa* – Islamic faith promotion and proselytizing – is extremely difficult to uncover. Following the post-9/11 backlash against a number of Muslim aid organizations and accusations that the groups were colluding with terrorist organizations, information became scarcer still.[2] Although the Gulf brand of Islam is undoubtedly conservative, Saudi Arabia has gone out of its way in recent years to argue that it is neither extreme nor intolerant.[3]

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom's unique role within Islam as the site of Mecca and Medina and the intellectual home for Gulf Islamic thought has made it the region's de facto leader of faith promotion efforts, a position it has eagerly embraced. Indeed, the Kingdom frequently provides travel assistance, clothing, and other support to those making the hajj; supplies food for Muslims that cannot afford *iftar* meals during Ramadan; funds the construction and operation of Islamic schools, mosques, orphanages, and clinics; and supports Islamic education by training teachers, providing learning materials, designing curricula, and offering scholarships to Muslim students from around the world. Kuwait and the UAE engage in many of these same efforts as well, but to a lesser extent.

These three countries tend to focus their faith promotion efforts in Africa on Muslim countries and countries with significant Muslim minorities. Their initiatives target Muslims in nearly every country in West, North, and East Africa, but they are also engaged in South Africa and many of the African Indian Ocean states.

According to some academics, much of the aid Saudi Arabia provides – often in response to direct requests made by Muslim countries – is given expressly to bolster the Kingdom's status as leader of the Muslim world. These efforts aim to counter the religious influence of both Egypt and Iran[4] – and the magnitude of this aid is significant. In 2005, former CIA director James Woolsey testified that in the 30-year period ending in 2005, Saudi charities, government, and individual donors had spent nearly $90 billion promoting Wahabism overseas.[5] Although only a fraction of this amount was directed at Africa, the limited public information available suggests that, in the years since, these three GCC countries continue to be significantly engaged in supporting religious activity on the continent.

Aid as *Dawa*

The intertwined nature of GGC engagement and *dawa* efforts is particularly reflected in humanitarian and development assistance. Muslim NGOs today take a wide variety of positions on the proper role of religion in their efforts. Those based in the Gulf, however, tend to follow in the footsteps of the conservative pan-Islamic organizations founded in the 1960s and 1970s in the region as a counter to Nasser's secular Arab nationalism.[6] From the beginning, these institutions – among them, the Muslim World League and World Assembly of Muslim Youth – promoted cooperation and solidarity with other Muslims; encouraged the study of Arab culture, the Arabic language, and the

Quran; and implemented relief and charity projects – all the while disseminating a conservative form of Islam that was at the core of their founding rationales.[7]

The new Muslim aid organizations that emerged in the late 1970s, bolstered by spikes in Gulf oil revenues, further prioritized transnational *dawa* over other missions. Up until that point, Gulf states eager to expose Muslims outside the region to their brand of Islam had few opportunities to do so beyond the Hajj.[8] Looking beyond their borders, these organizations' efforts in Africa aimed to counteract the expansion of Christian NGOs taking place on the continent at the time and spread Wahabi thought in more moderate Muslim communities while improving the physical and spiritual lives of their African coreligionists.[9]

A focus on Muslim countries and Muslim minority populations flowed naturally from the chief goal of these Gulf-based groups: strengthening the global community of Muslim believers – known as the *umma* – in line with Saudi King Faisal's much-vaunted idea of *al tadamun al islami*, or pan-Islamic solidarity.[10] By some accounts, Salafi-inspired organizations have interpreted the call to strengthen the *umma* as instruction to focus less on getting new converts to Islam and more on persuading existing Muslims to follow "a more puritan interpretation of Sunni [teachings]."[11] This lack of universalism in aid, however, has led to criticism from many Western organizations that argue it is immoral to direct aid based on religious belief rather than need.[12] Saudi charities tend to reject the idea that they target Muslim populations exclusively, arguing that instead, Muslims happen to live in countries that are among the most in need of humanitarian assistance.[13]

While support by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE to Islamic communities has generally been well received in Africa, it has also generated some controversy. Saudi treatment of African participants in the annual *Hajj* has caused a number of controversies. This year, for example, Nigerian female participants were stranded for days in Saudi Arabia because they were not accompanied by mandatory male guardians, and pilgrims from Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were banned because of concern about recent cholera and Ebola epidemics in their home countries. Ethiopia, home to a significant Muslim population, has expressed its concerns about Saudi support for alleged extremist organizations; at the end of October 2012 it arrested 29 Muslim leaders and activists who had reportedly received funding from the Saudi Embassy.[14]

GCC Economic Assistance to Africa: A Major Engagement Tool

Although economic and humanitarian assistance is one of the major policy tools that the GCC states use to engage with Africa, tracking the aid that they provide is difficult.

- While the GGC states are beginning to put more information on their aid activities into the public domain, this practice varies significantly. Only Kuwait, Saudi

Arabia, and the UAE have consistently reported bilateral development aid in recent years. Qatar this summer reportedly prepared a report on its economic assistance activities worldwide for 2010-2011,[15] but IDA has not been able to obtain a copy. Neither Bahrain nor Oman has published reports.

- Publicly reported bilateral development aid reflects only a portion of the assistance that these countries provide. Much of the assistance that the GCC states provide to African nations goes through multilateral institutions, such as the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.[16]
- Bilateral humanitarian assistance is particularly difficult to track. In the GCC countries, for example, humanitarian aid is typically provided through a mix of government funding, funding from royal family charities, and private charities; reporting of humanitarian assistance is even less robust than that for development aid.

While it is impossible to provide a complete portrait of GCC aid, the bilateral development aid that three of the GCC states have provided to Africa in recent years provides at least a partial window into Gulf aid priorities. Examining publicly available data on the activities of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE suggests:

- The largest segment of Gulf developmental assistance to Africa consists of concessional loans that support infrastructure development: the construction of dams and related power or irrigation infrastructure; the development of road networks, and to a lesser degree, the construction of education and medical facilities.
- Because publicly available data involve only loan agreements and not actual disbursements, the precise U.S. dollar value of these loans is uncertain since disbursements likely occur over time. Nonetheless, they appear to be fairly modest, given GCC wealth and the funding that they provide to Arab countries. During the 2005-2011 period, for example, total Saudi development loans to African countries were somewhat less than $1 billion, Kuwait loans were more than $1 billion, and loans from the UAE were less than $500 million. By comparison, the Qatari government announced in August 2012 that it would lend $2 billion to Egypt.

In terms of recipients, both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia provide some level of assistance to a fairly large number of African countries while recipients of UAE assistance are far fewer – reflecting in part their reduced aid profile. From 2005 to 2011, for example, the Saudi and Kuwait governments provided development aid to 24 countries and 31 countries respectively while only 13 countries received loans or grants from the UAE. Table 1, which lists the largest recipients of development aid from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, suggests that GCC aid is concentrated on a smaller sub-set of countries with majority Muslim populations in the northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa. The significant exceptions to this pattern are Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles and Tanzania – reflecting in part an interest in good ties to the several neighbors who can contribute to addressing the myriad security challenges – including piracy – posed by instability in Somalia.

Table 1. Top Recipients of GCG Developmental Aid, 2005-2011

Saudi Arabia (Saudi Development Fund)	**Kuwait (Kuwait Development Fund)**	**UAE (Abu Dhabi Fund for Development)**
Sudan*	Sudan*	Sudan*
Mauritania*	Senegal*	Seychelles
Senegal*	Mauritania*	Tanzania
Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Eritrea
Mali*	Djibouti*	Gambia* (tie)
Burkina Faso*	Kenya	Benin* (tie)
Niger*	Gambia*	Burkina Faso*(tie)
Gambia*	Burkina Faso*	Niger* (tie)
Benin*	Mali*	Djibouti*
Rwanda	Benin*	Guinea*

*OIC Member

Sources: For Kuwait (AidData); for Saudi Arabia (Saudi Development Fund annual reports); and for UAE (Abu Dhabi Fund for Development annual reports)

Among African countries, Sudan is in a category by itself as a recipient of Gulf developmental assistance. During the 2005-2011 timeframe, for example, it accounted for 26 percent of Saudi bilateral developmental aid to Africa, 23 percent of Kuwait aid, and 48 percent of UAE assistance. The heavy attention given to Sudan appears to reflect a variety of factors, including its status as an Arab country, Gulf investment interest, and its role as a venue for conflicts in recent years that have captured regional and international attention (e.g., Darfur, South Sudan). According to the IMF, between 2005 and 2009, Sudan was the second largest recipient of inter-Arab Foreign Direct Investment – totaling about $16 billion, with Saudi Arabia providing much of that funding.[17]

While there are much more limited public data on Gulf provision on other types of assistance to Africa, a recent assessment of Saudi Arabia's humanitarian assistance programs characterized them as a blend of "opportunity and reactivity"[18] – a characterization that can also be readily applied to the other aid activities of its Gulf allies.

- Since 2009, the UAE has leaned forward to delineate the full array of publicly and privately funded foreign aid that the Emirates has provided around the world. In 2011, public and royal family-associated foundations in the UAE accounted for approximately 60 percent of the assistance that the UAE sent to sub-Saharan Africa.[19] The types of assistance provided were very diverse, including support for public education; humanitarian aid to drought-prone areas in the Horn of Africa; medical assistance; and even wildlife conservation. Beyond Sudan, the UAE has in recent years emphasized assistance to the Seychelles in the wake of the impact that piracy has had on its economy.[20]
- Outside of funding provided by the Saudi Development Fund, Riyadh provides only limited information on the various types of other assistance that it provides. Over the past year or so, Riyadh has highlighted its role in providing various types of humanitarian assistance. For example, the government provided food supplies to Burkina Faso and Ethiopia in July 2012, and in November helped fund World Food Program activities in Niger. In 2011, a royal family charity, the Alwaleed Foundation, provided funds for famine relief in Somalia and medical aid to the Gambia.
- Doha appears to use aid to African countries as an adjunct to its broader efforts to be – and be seen as – a player on the global scene. In these efforts, Sudan seems to be given particular prominence in light of Qatar's role in facilitating agreements with regard to Darfur. The Qatar Red Crescent Society has long been active in Darfur, and Qatar reportedly promised to invest $2 billion to address underdevelopment in the Darfur region.[21] Earlier this year, Qatar reportedly provided $6 million for the newly established regional authority in Darfur. And, in April 2012, the Sudanese Minister of Tourism announced that Qatar had committed to providing $124 million to fund the development of national historic sites as part of a tourism development initiative.[22] Elsewhere in Africa, Qatar Charity is providing assistance to refugees in Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. The Qatari Red Crescent Society is working with counterparts in Mali and Niger to assist them in addressing the ongoing challenge of food security in the region. While there does not appear to be evidence to support claims that Doha has used the Red Crescent Society presence in Mali to support jihadists in northern Mali, the Society has been criticized for its unwillingness to work with other NGOs in the area.[23]
- Within Africa, Bahrain's Royal Charity Organization (RCO) has focused on Somalia where it has provided foodstuffs and medical supplies, funded the

digging of water wells, financed the construction of a hospital in Mogadishu, and supported ophthalmic treatment for thousands of Somalis.[24]

The Changing GCC-Africa Trade Dynamic

There has been significant trade growth between the GCC and Africa in recent decades. GCC-Africa trade went from $2.8 billion in 1990 to $25.7 billion in 2008, though this amount fell to $18.1 billion in 2009 as global markets contracted.[25] Since then, trade between the GCC and Africa has continued to grow at both the bilateral and regional levels. The trade balance significantly favors Gulf states and has increasingly favored them since 1980.[26]

Additionally, the composition of GCC-Africa trade has significantly changed over the past three decades. Gulf exports to Africa were long dominated by crude oil and other unprocessed primary products. These products constituted 84 percent of Gulf exports to Africa in 1980; in 2005, they made up less than 38 percent.[27] Exports of primary products to the Gulf *from* Africa have significantly declined as well, going from 82.4 percent of exports in 1980 to 39.2 percent in 2005. The South African case is particularly stark – over this time period, these exports fell to just 2.5 percent of the total.[28]

Also notable:

- Between 1980 and 2005, African exports of all products to the Gulf increased threefold – and faster than African exports to other regions.
- In three out of the five countries with available data (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE), the volume of trade with Africa from 1980 to 2005 grew both in an absolute sense and as a proportion of total exports. The UAE case is particularly striking – their exports to Africa went from $29 million in 1980 to $1.6 billion in 2005.[29]
- African countries have not benefited uniformly from this expanded trade. For example, in 2011, two-thirds of total Saudi Arabian exports to Africa went to South Africa and Egypt – and around two thirds of the Kingdom's imports from Africa came from Egypt alone.[30]

Illicit Trade

Illicit trade between the Gulf and Africa has long historical roots. Although most insight into this trade comes from anecdotal reporting, it appears to take advantage of the same transportation, financial, and communications links that facilitate licit trade. Based on publicly available reports of arrests and seizures, the most prominent illegal shipments appear to involve:

- Diamonds: Trafficking of illicit or grey market African diamonds has been linked to the UAE in particular, although there are no indications of state complicity in open source reporting.
- Wildlife and wildlife products: Smugglers of wildlife and derived products such as ivory to the Gulf generally target central and east African countries for supply. Reports of such trafficking occasionally appear in open sources, but a robust smuggling network does not appear to exist at this time.
- Drugs: Although the movement of drugs through West Africa to Europe is the Africa's most significant narcotics challenge, there is some reporting of low-level trafficking of drugs between the Gulf and Africa. Arrests of smugglers at Gulf and African airports carrying small quantities of drugs are not uncommon.

Whatever the magnitude and dynamics of illicit trade between these two regions, it has not yet reached sufficient levels to qualify as a key issue in GCC-Africa engagement.

Investment: Another GCC Engagement Tool

As with aid data, detailed information on GCC states' trade and investment activities in Africa is difficult to obtain and the actors involved – as well as their connection to their governments – are often obscured.

- GCC investment in Africa takes multiple forms, from bilateral agreements to public-private joint ventures to investments executed through sovereign wealth funds or multilateral institutions. This panoply of actors makes assessing the full scope of a country's trade and investment portfolio impossible.
- Saudi Arabia in particular favors joint ventures. Since 1994, the Kingdom has signed at least eight with South Africa and several more with Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, and others.[31]
- South Africa is one of the GCC's most favored partners for investment (and trade) on the continent (see Table 2); nearly all GCC countries have signed joint

ventures and memoranda of understanding with the country over the past decade, and in a wide range of fields.

- News reports and press releases provide the most easily accessible sources of information on these topics, but few aggregated data exist. Moreover, in these reports, the line between aid and investment is often blurred; conciliatory loans and forgiveness of debt are common.

Table 2. Key African Partners and Target Industries for GCC Trade and Investment

	Select African Partners						
Target Industries	South Africa	Sudan	Ethiopia	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Tanzania
Agriculture/Food Production	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Energy/Mining	x	x			x	x	x
ICT	x	x	x	x	x		
Defense/Armaments	x						
Tourism/Hospitality	x	x	x	x	x		x
Manufacturing	x	x	x			x	
Financial Services	x		x	x	x	x	
Construction		x	x	x		x	x

Despite the lack of clear and consistent information, some major patterns are evident.

- As with aid, GCC investment in Africa tends to favor countries in the North and East and those with significant Muslim populations, with a few notable exceptions. These exceptions appear to be made on pragmatic bases – e.g., in the case of South Africa, which offers GCC countries opportunities that other African countries cannot, such as a viable defense manufacturing sector.
- While investment in Africa is largely pursued by GCC countries for profit, some engagements appear to reflect a desire to strengthen bilateral ties and enhance the GCC country's soft power and influence on the continent.
- In most cases, African countries still need Gulf state investment more than the GCC needs its African partners[32] – though the Gulf's rapidly expanding food needs may be creating an exception to this rule.
- Data suggest that sophisticated or technologically advanced Gulf exports have more of a competitive advantage in Africa than they do in other regions.[33] This is

likely due to the interaction of several forms of privileged market access, including geographical proximity and shared cultural, historical, and religious ties.

Although their levels of investment vary substantially, every GCC country has invested in a diverse portfolio of industries in Africa (see Table 3). Most investments have been made in the following eight categories: agriculture/food production, energy/mining,[34] information and communications technology (ICT),[35] defense/armaments, tourism/hospitality, manufacturing, financial services,[36] and construction.

Table 3. GCC Trade and Investment in Africa by GCC Country and Target Industry

	GCC Countries					
African Target Industries	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE
Energy/Mining	x	x	x	x	x	x
Agriculture/Food Production	x	x		x	x	x
Financial Services	x	x	x	x	x	
Manufacturing		x	x	x	x	x
Construction		x		x	x	x
Tourism/Hospitality			x	x	x	x
ICT	x	x			x	x
Defense/Armaments			x			x

One of the fastest growing categories of GCC investment in Africa is agriculture and food production. "Food security," a core element of Saudi Arabia's national security agenda,[37] it dominates this area of investment. As of mid-2012, various Saudi groups are said to have signed deals for more than 800,000 hectares of land in Africa – 70 percent of all such deals the country has signed worldwide – with plans to sign more.38

Saudi Arabia launched its efforts to grow a "strategic reserve" of staple grains and other food abroad after the 2007 contraction in the global commodities markets that led to food shortages and price hikes in the country alongside rare public outcry.[39] "Land-rich, cash-poor countries around the world" have been targeted in this initiative, chief among them Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia.[40] Saudi Arabia's first shipment of rice grown abroad – in Ethiopia – arrived in the Kingdom in March 2009.[41]

There is some disagreement within Saudi Arabia as to whether investing in agriculture in conflict-prone countries like Sudan is worth the risk when the country's resources would allow it to easily outbid others for land in more stable countries like Australia or Canada. World Trade Organization rules allow countries to keep agricultural products for themselves in times of shortage, a stipulation that has burned Gulf investors in the past. To give one example, a $1 billion Saudi and Kuwaiti joint investment in a sugar company outside Khartoum resulted in a robust sugar manufacturing operation that years after its opening had failed to actually export any sugar to its Gulf patrons, as the plant's production was insufficient to offset pervasive domestic shortages across Sudan.[42]

With the exception of Oman, the other GCC countries have also made significant investments in agriculture and food production in Africa.

- In September 2012, Bahrain signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Union in which it expressed its desire to expand trade and investment on the continent, especially as it relates to food security.[43] The next month, Bahrain announced expanded investment in agriculture and animals in Sudan.
- Qatar's involvement with agriculture in Africa escalated in 2008 with the establishment of a joint holding company with Sudan to facilitate agricultural investment.[44] Later that year, the country leased 40,000 hectares of land in Kenya to grow fruit and vegetables for export in exchange for funding a $2.3 billion port project at Lamu.[45]
- 2008 was also a pivotal year for Kuwait, which signed a "giant" strategic agricultural partnership with Sudan, though few details have emerged about the arrangement.[46]
- By August 2008, the UAE had already secured nearly 400,000 hectares of land in Sudan for its agricultural needs[47] and initiated a 5,000-hectare joint tea growing venture with an Ethiopian company.[48] In 2012, UAE announced it planned to make significant new investments in Sudanese and Ethiopian agricultural and industrial projects.

Migrant Labor: Economic Flows and Social Tensions

Migrant labor is another important economic linkage between the GCC and African states. Migrants numbering in the high hundreds of thousands have traveled from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf over the past decade seeking employment, and the rate of migration is sharply increasing.[49] In 2011, more than 70,000 such laborers came from Ethiopia through Yemen alone – only one of the region's multiple labor exporting countries and one of many transit points.[50] The number of migrants from the Horn of Africa who transited through Yemen in 2011 was double that of in 2010.[51] The International Labor Organization has estimated that migrant workers comprise approximately 50 percent of the resident population of the GCC, and other estimates are as high as 80 percent.[52] Among Gulf countries, demand for imported labor varies;

Human Rights Watch has reported that Kuwait employs 660,000 migrant workers – a figure double the Kuwaiti citizen population. In 2010, non-nationals were more than 82 percent of the population of UAE.[53]

The UN and many non-profit observers have warned of the dangers of these increasing labor flows from Africa to the Gulf and their potential to stoke instability in both home and destination countries. Issues including human trafficking, forced sex work, bolstering of criminal networks, and spiking urban violence have all been linked to these labor flows. Though many migrant workers leave their home countries of their own accord – generally in response to economic pressures – a significant subset are subjected to violence, kidnapping, and being held for ransom at some point during their journeys.

Those who manage to arrive at their intended destinations are often subjected to further coercion and violence, their movements limited, wages withheld, and passports confiscated under the kafala system, in which the native employer has complete control over all aspects of the laborer's stay in the country.[54] Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman have announced initiatives to reform the kafala system at various points over the past decade, but little actual change has been implemented.[55]

Few Gulf countries' legal codes consider migrant workers – especially those who serve as domestic help – to be either full employees or refugees, two statuses that would provide them with legal protections and access to state programs and resources.[56] A preference for Asian and Arabic-speaking migrant workers puts Africans at a further disadvantage and, especially in the case of domestic help, increases these individuals' vulnerability.[57]

Labor supply countries in Africa have recently adopted a more aggressive stance in defense of their foreign worker populations, heightening tensions with the Gulf.

- In July 2012, Ethiopia banned additional citizens from working in the UAE after what the government described as a critical mass of complaints of serious abuse, unsafe working conditions, and withholding of wages.[58] Ethiopia's ban did not last – in November 2012, sources reported that Addis Ababa had signed new labor agreements with the UAE that did little to change the conditions faced by its citizens in the Gulf.[59]
- The Kenyan government attempted to ban its citizens from seeking domestic work in the Middle East in summer 2012 as well. Nairobi's announcement was thought to be targeted at Saudi Arabia, which hosts around 3,000 Kenyan workers.[60] The ban was controversial and unevenly enforced; some have argued that this is because the Kenyan economy depends on the remittances it receives from Gulf workers. Kenya received nearly $900 million in remittances from workers in all countries in 2011 – a 40 percent jump from 2010 levels.[61]

Although data on remittances is incomplete, especially in the African context, the World Bank estimates that payments from migrant workers in GCC countries to sub-Saharan Africa made up 9 percent of total remittances to the region in 2010.[62] Remittances from GCC countries to North Africa constituted 27 percent of that region's total remittances.[63] These payments are thought to be a strong stabilizing force in African economies and were largely unaffected by the global economic downturn. Their importance will likely persist in coming decades as African economies continue to grow amid year to year fluctuations in foreign direct investment and private investment.[64]

The GCC is expected to continue to require a significant amount of foreign labor in the coming decades – in a much tighter global labor market. Rising African and South Asian standards of living combined with aging populations in OECD countries will constrict supply and increase demand.[65] For these reasons, tensions over labor flows are likely to persist.

If one or more of the GCC countries were to experience significant political instability approximating that seen in Egypt and Libya, it is likely that the region's large populations of foreign laborers – including African migrants – would be significantly affected. Although it is impossible to forecast the precise consequences of such a scenario, the recent Libyan experience suggests two probable lessons:

- First, while migrant workers in the Gulf are less integrated into the societies of their host nations than their counterparts were in Qadhafi's Libya, they still play an important role in these economies. The important role that migrant labor plays in the Gulf – combined with the enormous importance of the remittances these workers send home – ensures that any disruption of these labor and economic flows would be significant and reverberate to the African continent.
- Second, any disruption to these flows would likely be temporary, as economic realities in both GCC and African labor markets would provide pressure to return to the *status quo ante*. In the GCC case, however, African workers who left the Gulf during a period of conflict might find returning in its wake more difficult than laborers in Libya due to a combination of geography, growing Gulf preference for Asian and non-African Arab workers, and other factors.

More Limited Engagement on Defense and Security Issues

GCC cooperation with African countries in the area of defense and security has been less significant than its engagement in the economic arena. Moreover, when GCC governments have engaged on these issues, they have tended to reflect specific priorities of individual states.

Countering Iran

While the GCC states have not publicly expressed concern about Iranian activities in Africa, some – particularly Saudi Arabia – appear to give at least some weight in their engagement in the region to their broader concerns about Iranian ambitions. While Tehran's rhetoric about its willingness to engage with Africa exceeds its actual accomplishments, the high public profile given to Africa by President Ahmadinejad in recent years has almost certainly drawn the attention of Iran's Persian Gulf neighbors.

Sudan: a Particular Focus of Attention

Sudan has been a key focus of both Iranian and GCC engagement in Africa. Going back to 2000, the only years in which Sudan and Iran failed to meet at least once in either of the two countries were 2001 and 2005. Since 2007, at least one high-level delegation from Iran has visited Sudan each year – and two of these were led by President Ahmadinejad himself. The only exception to this was in 2010, when Tehran hosted 40 African delegations for its Iran-Africa Forum. On the GCC side of the ledger, as noted earlier, Sudan has been by far the largest beneficiary of GCC development assistance and a primary venue for GCC investment.

Although the economic benefits to Sudan of Iran's courtship are unclear, the bilateral security relationship appears to be durable. As recently as November 13, 2012, the two countries again publicly professed their mutual desire to expand bilateral ties after a high-level meeting.[66] This came on the heels of Iran sending two warships to dock at Port Sudan following what Khartoum alleged was an Israeli airstrike on a Sudanese arms manufacturer. Official Iranian media reported that the ships carried "the message of peace and friendship to neighbouring countries and were ensuring security for shipping lanes against marine terrorism and piracy."[67] Unsurprisingly, many of the Gulf states and Israel interpreted the visit differently, as irresponsible "muscle flexing"[68] and further proof that "the Khartoum-Tehran axis" is as strong as ever.[69]

Among the GCC countries, Saudi Arabia in particular has been particularly concerned about Iranian activities in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Saudi concern has been evidenced by:

- Accusations by Saudi-backed Bahrain in the fall of 2011 that Iran was inciting elements of Bahrain's Shia population to violence.[70]
- The Saudi government's decision in September 2012 to limit quotas for this year's *hajj* because of information that Iranian agents under cover as pilgrims were planning to disturb the *hajj* with "an illicit attempt to turn a peaceful practice in Islam into a political firestorm with demonstrations and rallies."[71]

- Fierce competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for OPEC's secretary-general position in October 2012,[72] around which time Saudi Arabia arrested 14 Iranians it claims "attempted to infiltrate the country by sea."[73]
- November 2012 Saudi complaints in writing to both the Iranian Foreign Ministry and the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding what it described as continuing incidents of trespassing on its territory and breaches of official agreements.[74]

While we lack insight into private discussions between Riyadh and Khartoum, we judge that it is probable that Sudanese engagement with Iran was an issue in the reported meetings that President Bashir held in Riyadh with the Saudi King and other senior officials during his early November 2012 visit there for medical treatment.[75] Any representations that the Saudi leadership may have made about Iran, however, do not appear to have altered Khartoum's willingness to deal with Tehran. Despite the concerns voiced publicly by the Sudanese Foreign Minister and the Sudanese press about getting too close to Iran, the Sudanese government agreed to host another Iranian naval visit in late November.

Counter-Piracy

The threat of piracy emanating from Somalia has been a significant agenda item in Gulf-Africa security engagement in recent years, with the UAE taking the lead in fostering increased collaboration with and support to the principally affected African states. The UAE's role has been varied – ranging from hosting major international conferences on piracy in 2011 and 2012 to the provision of assistance to select governments.

Recognizing that the piracy challenge cannot be fully addressed without a more secure environment in Somalia, the UAE has been actively engaged in Somalia with the objective of building governmental capacity to tackle the problem locally.

- While the details are not publicly known, the UAE has provided funding for the development of the Somali Maritime Security Forces, whose objective is to counter piracy on land in Somalia.[76] At the international conference that it hosted in July 2012, the UAE promised additional "comprehensive" assistance to help the Somali government develop a national coast guard.
- In a program that proved to be controversial, UAE royals reportedly provided funding for a private Western security firm to train the Puntland Maritime Police Force, making it – according to a UN report – a well-equipped elite force over 1,000 strong that reports directly to the President of Puntland.[77]
- To address the legal challenges associated with the phenomenon of piracy, the UAE has also teamed with the French government to train members of the Somali

judiciary on how to prosecute pirates. It has also provided funding – most recently $1 million – to the (UN) Trust Fund to Support the Initiatives of States to Counter Piracy off the Coast of Somalia. The principal purpose of this fund is to strengthen the capability of governments in Somalia, Kenya, and the Seychelles to region to handle piracy-related criminal cases.

Outside of Somalia, the UAE has focused its assistance on the Seychelles. It has provided funding for construction of a Coast Guard base that opened in November 2011, coastal surveillance radar, communication equipment, and five patrol boats. In the wake of the economic impact that piracy has had on the Seychelles, the UAE provided significant grant assistance in recent years for housing and general budget support.

The only other GCC nation that has been a public player with Africa on the piracy issue has been Oman. In March 2012, Oman and South Africa signed an MOU on defense cooperation, a major objective of which was the sharing of lessons learned between the Omani and South African navies on protection of international sea routes.[78]

Arms Procurement

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman have in recent years acquired only limited amounts of conventional military equipment from South Africa. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) database, Saudi Arabia in 2007 and 2008 acquired 50 RG-32 Scout Armored Personnel Carriers (APC). SIPRI's database indicates that the Emirates acquired almost 200 RG-31 Nyala APCs from 2006 to 2011. The UAE also relies on South African maintenance for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that it acquired from South Africa a number of years ago. Oman was the first Gulf state to buy military hardware from South Africa, a relationship that has persisted for more than a decade.[79]

Faced with a constrained defense budget, significant military modernization shortfalls, and a prospective decline in sales of mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles from the U.S. and others, South Africa in September 2012 initiated a joint venture with a government-owned UAE firm for the development, manufacture, and integration of precision-guided weapons systems.[80] A major objective of this new company, Tawazun Dynamics, is to renew long-standing arms procurement ties with the UAE and establish a firmer foothold in the lucrative Middle East arms market.

Instability in the Western Sahel

As noted earlier, the GCC countries have long given priority to providing economic assistance to such countries as Benin, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. In the wake of the effects that the Arab Spring – particularly the civil war in Libya – have had on the region, GCC countries appear to have become somewhat more actively engaged from a security perspective, although the parameters of that engagement are unclear.

- In May 2012, the Saudi government hosted a visit by the Mauritania's National Command and Staff School and approved an agreement negotiated in late 2011 to work with Mauritania to counter terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling. The precise terms of this agreement are not known, but apparently involve Saudi provision of funding and training.
- In October 2012, the Qatari Emir held a meeting with President Traore of Mali to discuss the security situation in Northern Mali.

Selective Exercise of "Quiet Diplomacy"

As they do elsewhere in the world, some of the GCC states play a role in facilitating regional engagement and conflict resolution in Africa. Taking advantage of their ability to provide financial assistance and their perceived impartiality with regard to several African conflicts, they have become players within the international community in conflict mediation.

Qatar has been the most prominent GCC player in this regard and shows every indication that it will continue to play this role in the future.[81]

- Qatar's active involvement in the Darfur conflict dates to 2008.[82] Since then Doha has been the host for rounds of negotiations involving the Sudanese government and various rebel groups – hosting these delegations for months at a time. Beyond its own provision of financial aid, Qatar has also been active in pressing both Sudan and the international community to deliver on financial support that was previously promised in the 2010 donors' conference. In a sign of Qatar's continuing efforts regarding Darfur, the Sudanese government and a faction of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) signed a declaration in Qatar in late October 2012 to cease hostility and hold peace talks.[83] The Qatari role in Darfur has been well received by the various parties involved.
- Qatar was selected in June 2010 to mediate the long-running border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti. Both countries signed an agreement to resolve their border dispute through a negotiated settlement; conduct an exchange of prisoners; and commit to Qatari monitoring of the border area until a final settlement was reached. Progress in resolving this dispute appears to have been negligible in the time since, but both Eritrea and Djibouti have stated that they remain committed to Qatari mediation.

Given African acceptance of Qatar's role as a mediator in these two conflicts and the significant role that it has played – and will continue to play – in supporting political change in North Africa (particularly Libya), it is possible that Doha could at some point become more engaged with regard to northern Mali should engagement by a non-African and non-European facilitator be required.

Activities by other GCC states to serve a facilitation role have been more limited.

- Currently Kuwait is engaged, on behalf of the Arab League, with the African Union (AU) in planning for the Third Arab-African summit, which is scheduled to be held in Kuwait next year. Former Libyan leader Qadhafi in October 2010 hosted the last summit, which was attended by more than 60 leaders. Given Qadhafi's role as the most active Arab leader in Africa and the differences in opinion about his forced removal between the AU and Gulf states such as Qatar, it is likely that both the Gulf nations and the AU see this as an important opportunity to try to rebuild relationships that have languished since the Arab Spring.

Potential Drivers of Change in GCC-Africa Ties

With political ferment in the Middle East and North Africa continuing and the associated political outcomes still uncertain, it is too early to make definitive judgments about how those developments or other changes could affect how the GCC states engage with Africa over the longer term. That said, it is possible to identify several broad drivers that could affect the future of such engagement.

- Increased Attention on Issues Closer to Home. GCC policy attention to Africa has always been limited relative to its much greater focus on developments within the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Given the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Syria and the potential for instability in such venues as Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, there is a significant possibility that the generally small decision-making circles and policy implementation structures of the GCC states could be consumed by crises closer to home. In August 2012, aid organizations in Gaza voiced concern that shifts in financial aid to deal with famine in Africa and the humanitarian consequences of the Arab Spring had reduced Arab funding for Palestinian charities.[84] It is not hard to imagine that events such as the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria or a renewed confrontation between Hizballah and Israel would constrain GCC will and capacity to focus attention and resources on Africa.
- Significant New Instability in the Sahel. Although the Libyan civil war has negatively affected such neighbors as Mali and Niger, the Arab Spring generally did not translate into significant political change in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, several governments in the region are still under considerable pressure and a change in a government where the GCC states are already heavily invested could push them to increase their engagement to protect their political

and economic investments. A violent change of government in Sudan could, for example, provoke step-level increases in engagement there by the GCC countries.

- A Dramatic Change in Africa's Investment Appeal. The IMF and other economic experts assess that African countries, on average, should continue to enjoy a reasonable level of economic growth over the next year or so – even as the world economy slows down. GCC investment in Africa is a small portion of their global investment portfolios. As a consequence, a significant downturn in GCC investment in Africa appears unlikely. Investment in Africa would likely be affected only by a major drop in energy prices that might require the GCC states to significantly draw down their financial reserves

- A Collective Decision for a "Reset" in Arab-Africa Ties. Collective interest in promoting multilateral ties between Arab and African states has been intermittent at best over the years. The first Arab-Africa summit was hosted by President Mubarak in 1977, and the second was hosted by Libyan leader Qadhafi in 2010. In the wake of the forcible removal of Qadhafi, which was largely welcomed by the Arab world and resisted by African leaders, there appears to be some interest by both the Arab League and the Africa Union in rebuilding ties that were largely abandoned during the years when the Libyan leader asserted his primacy over Arab engagement with Africa. While it would be foolhardy to expect dramatic results from the next Arab-Africa summit that will be held in Kuwait next year, a positive session could lay the groundwork for new mechanisms of engagement in the years ahead.

- Iranian Success in Gaining Influence in Key Countries. Tehran, for all of its rhetoric about wanting to expand its relations with Africa, has had little success – outside of Sudan – in building its influence in the region and, given the challenges that it faces economically and in its own neighborhood (e.g., Syria), is not well positioned to make significant new inroads in the future. While the prospects for Iranian success are limited, GCC countries would be sensitive to signs that the Iranians are expanding their footholds in countries that the GCC cares about – for example, Somalia and Sudan.

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*
December 2012

2. REPORT TYPE
IAD Draft Final

3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
07-2012 – 03-2013

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
The Impact of the Arab Spring on Africa: Gulf Cooperation Council Engagement with Africa

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
2012-12062700-003

5b. GRANT NUMBER
— — —

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
— — —

6. AUTHOR(S)
John A. Kringen

5d. PROJECT NUMBER
— — —

5e. TASK NUMBER
EE-55-3604

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
— — —

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
Institute for Defense Analyses
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, Virginia 22311-1882

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
IDA Document D-4826
Log: H 13-000370

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
Institute for Defense Analyses
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, Virginia 22311-1882

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
— — —

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited (18 July 2013).

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
— — —

14. ABSTRACT
An exploration of GCC engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. Key forms of engagement are identified as: trade and investment, humanitarian and development aid, diplomatic outreach, propagation of Islam, and defense and security cooperation.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sub-Saharan Africa, Sahel, East Africa, African Union, Arab League, Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), Iran, trade,

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
					Richard Porterfield
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(include area code)*
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unlimited	33	703-578-2812

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18