

Hereditary Oil Monarchies: Why Arab Spring Fails in GCC Arabian States?

Aydın AYDIN*

ABSTRACT

This study tries to reveal the reasons of why Arab Spring could not change the hereditary oil monarchies regimes in Persian Gulf, when compare with other countries in region. The strong cooperation between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman, hereditary monarchies for long years, high oil and natural gas income and sharing with lower social class that did not cause to improve strong demand among public to change regime of countries, also the external powers such as America and European Union restrained to spread Arabic Spring out in these countries due to their energy benefits.

Key Words:*Gulf Cooperation Council, Arabic Spring, Monarchy Regimes*

Kalıtısal Petrol Monarşileri: Neden Arap Baharı GCC Arap Devletlerinde Başarısız Oldu?

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada monarşik rejimle yönetilen Körfez İşbirliği Teşkilatı üyesi ülkelerinde Arap Baharı'nın neden diğer bölge ülkelerinde olduğu gibi etkili olmadığına sebepleri ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Körfez İşbirliği Teşkilatı ülkeleri; Suudi Arabistan, Kuveyt, Bahreyn, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri, Katar ve Umman'ın çok sıkı bir işbirliği içinde olması, yönetici elitlerin uzun yıllardan beri ülke yönetiminde söz sahibi olmaları, bu ülkelerin petrol ve doğalgaz gelirlerinin yüksek olması ve dolayısıyla bu gelirleri tabana yayma imkanlarının oluşması ülke halklarının devlete karşı güçlü bir rejim değişikliği talebinin oluşmamasına sebebiyet vermiştir. Ayrıca Avrupa Birliği ve Amerika'nın bu ülkelerindeki enerji politikalarının sekteye uğramaması için Arap Baharı'nın bu ülkelerde yayılmamasına katkıda bulunmuşlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:*Körfez İşbirliği Ülkeleri, Arap Baharı, Monarşi Rejimleri*

Introduction

Arab Spring started in Tunisia and spread to other regional Arab countries in December 2010. World did not see any revolts in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries except Bahrain and little protests in Saudi Arabia. Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Oman, and Qatar) are all hereditary monarchies with Jordan and Morocco in the Middle East¹. Since all of the GCC countries are oil producers and benefit from rentier economy, therefore, we might ask question that why Arab Spring could not change the hereditary oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf? There are basic differences between GCC countries and Changed Regimes of the region. First of all, HOM (Hereditary Oil Monarchies) are settled long time ago with their strong support of tribes. Tribal traditions gave legitimacy to these ruling families in their small scale populations except Saudi Arabia's larger population. The second fundamental feature of these states is the wealth of oil and natural gas. Large amount of these incomes plus their investments in other industries to diversify

* PhD Candidate, Fatih University, Political Sciences and International Relations, Istanbul, Turkey, aydinap@gmail.com.

¹ John E. Peterson, "Succession in the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council," *The Washington Quarterly* 24 (2001): 173.

their economies gave extra strength to these HOM. These two features “curiously, the traditional roots of legitimacy and the oil-based transformation of the region worked to enhance the position and strength of ruling families.”² The third factor for their survival is to have international and regional support. The US was the dominant international support of the regional oil-based ruling system during the Cold War and afterwards. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was responded by US led coalition forces to balance regional powers. Saudi help in Bahrain to stop uprisings is an example for regional support. In economic terms, GCC economic agreement forces the member states to help each other in economic terms³ and we see this among emirates in UAE that Abu Dhabi helped Dubai economically during the latest recession of world economy.

Also, Arab Spring speeded up the competition among GCC countries namely between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Qatar increased its efforts to influence Islamic oriented groups such as Muslim Brotherhood to expand its political power to MENA.⁴ With its larger population and economy Saudi Arabia always had intention to influence regional issues so it led Gulf countries to establish GCC against regional threats such as Iran’s sectarian oriented foreign policies. GCC countries are Hereditary Monarchies; Jordan and Morocco are the only Hereditary Monarchies outside the Gulf and among MENA countries. When GCC countries looked at the Arab Spring they considered themselves to protect their own monarchies so they support each other against the waves of this Tsunami. On the other hand, they support opposition groups in countries that the waves struck: Qatar’s support for Libya opposition, Saudi’s support for Syrian opposition. Therefore, at the beginning stage of the Arab Spring, GCC began to consider including Jordan and Morocco in the GCC. For GCC, two dimensions of the Arab Spring create the dilemmas: Revolts happened in Republican countries and Shi’a majority or influence countries. Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, and Egypt all are somehow republican administrations that bear fruit for opposition groups. Also, Bahrain is the crucial case for GCC that almost %70 is Shi’a origin and revolts during the history and Arab Spring happened and it needed help to prevent the fall of the monarchy. Saudi Arabia helped Bahrain.⁵

On the other hand, after collapse of four republican authoritarian regimes in the region affected Syria and clashes are going on. Although people in the region believed in some changes would happen, some others are pessimistic about the process that the countries without necessary institutions for democracy will not achieve to change their systems into functioning democracies.⁶ It is certain that at the beginning of the regime changes nobody should expect full democratic creations. There must be bases to build democracy. When there is real armed clash this means those bases are too weak for proceeding for democracy. In this regard, “the Arab Spring has brought significant armed violence where institutions were especially weak,

²Ibid., 183.

³ The Cooperation for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) Secretariat General, “*The Economic Agreement between the GCC States*” 22nd Session, (Muscat: 2001).

⁴ Silvia Colombo, “The GCC and the Arab Spring: A Tale of Double Standards,” *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 47 (2012): 111-112.

⁵Ibid., 113-123.

⁶ Howard J. Wiarda, “Arab Fall or Arab Winter?,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 34(2012): 134.

where ethnic, tribal, and sectarian divisions were deep, and where effective power-sharing arrangements to mitigate the effects of these cleavages were lacking.”⁷ Robert Springborg approaches the issue by comparing other revolution in the world namely 1848 European and 1989 Eastern European springs. He argues that there must be some kind of powers to force those countries towards democratic changes and market capitalism. Also there should be organization to support security to transformed countries to develop their own institutions.⁸ There are only two powers to force GCC countries: EU and the US. They do not push GCC towards that direction so it is hard for GCC to be transformed.

On the opposite side of the settled theory of the hegemony of the US as a driving force of the changes around world, in Arab Spring, the US and other western powers lost the initiatives and with the exception of Libya case which NATO involved to save Libyans from Kaddafi’s forces and destroy main elements of the Kaddafi’s army. Four regime changes and ongoing Syria case show that “paradoxically the United States, which triggered the historic process leading to these changes, is no longer in the driving seat of change. Instead, three regional powers are trying to direct the inevitable change into channels that reflect their own, often sharply conflicting, interests.”⁹ These three are Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Saudi attempt to influence events of the Arab Spring is certain and understandable. However, Qatar is posing different dimension. Although Qatar has small population it acts internationally as a big effective country. Its economy is in good condition with its number one GDP per capita in the world. Its educational projects that attract many students from Saudi Arabia to other regional countries are very famous that brought many American famous universities to Qatar to open new campuses in this small area.¹⁰ Qatar is hosting US Central Command and Al-Jazeera TV stations. Its unique ruling style among GCC countries made this possible to have both at the same time. Ruling family members are responsible for their own ministries and usually they do not interfere each other.

But Qatar’s differences comes from its active foreign policies starting with Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Tani rule. He initiated those new policies for economy and education. Qatar established close economic relations with Israel in 1996 and this led to the negotiations of the Israel-Hamas. Qatar continued its effort as peace broker in Lebanon when Israel and Hezbollah made war. Qatar’s membership in UN Security Council supported Qatar to expand its foreign policies. Lebanon internal disputes were settled down by Doha Agreement in 2008. Its initiatives gave more power to Qatar to won 2022 World Cup organization. It is believed that Qatar stop

⁷ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Synder, “Democratization and the Arab Spring,” *International Interactions: Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations* 38 (2012): 731.

⁸ Robert Springborg, “Whither the Arab Spring? 1989 or 1848?,” *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 46 (2011): 5-6.

⁹ For the Record, “Implications of the Arab Spring,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 33 (2011): 293.

¹⁰ Dennis C. Robert, “The Student Personnel Point of View as a Catalyst for Dialogue: 75 Years and Beyond,” *Journal of College Student Development* 53 (2012): 13.

Al-Jazeera coverage of Bahrain protests since it supported Saudi backed Bahrain ruling family by being partner in GCC.¹¹

First Gulf War brought some changes to the ruling elites of the GCC. They felt to improve ruling systems towards more liberal ones. Kuwait received pressures from the US after the war; Saudi Arabia wanted to improve its image in the world. Other GCC countries also wanted to improve political conditions not because of ruling families' desires towards more liberal or democratic conditions but for the sake of keeping their powers by giving little. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain became the leader for starting Internet using in the GCC. Iranian revolution in 1979, Iran-Iraq War, First Gulf War in 1991, September 11 and aftermaths, and 2003 Iraqi invasion put pressure on the GCC countries to change some of their administrative ideologies.¹² However, in Arab Spring, the MENA countries themselves are causes for the change so it is normal to be influenced by these events for the GCC countries. Again, GCC ruling elites try to keep their power by doing immediate policies such as distributing money directly or indirectly.¹³ Changes are not easy in the GCC so "in the Gulf Monarchies, dynastic strategies of familial rule prevent royal leaders from making the limited democratic reforms seen in Morocco and Jordan."¹⁴

The Sectarian clashes are very common in the Gulf. There are two main rivals in this section: (Hanbali School of Sunni Islam) Wahhabi Saudi Arabia and Shi'an Iran. Their competition goes back to history that after creation of Wahhabi branch, Saudis began to attack Shi'a shrines. Even when there is no Islamic oriented government in Iran, the clashes between these two were exist. Saudi Arabia used this rhetoric to convince its small sized close friends in the Gulf for its foreign policies and for GCC foreign policies. However, in the region few Shias follow Iranian style religious governing and also "the Shi'ite Muslims in the Persian Gulf region, Central Asia, and the Caucasus-including Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and even in Pakistan and Afghanistan- never followed the Iranian political model.¹⁵ On the other hand, exaggerated Shi'an influence hit Saudi Arabia with Arab Spring. Its %10 Shi'a population mainly on the eastern shores began protests. Although these protests were small scale and not spread to other parts of the country, they were largest and longest in Saudi history.¹⁶ However, in 1981 Bahrain witnessed failed coup attempt by Shi'a group and it is revealed that group had direct relations with Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹⁷ Since Bahrain has the largest Shi'a population, Bahrain

¹¹ Andrew F. Cooper and Bessma Momani, "Qatar and Expanded Contours of Small State Diplomacy," *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 46 (2011): 113, 117-124.

¹² Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," *International Affairs* 79 (2003): 53-62.

¹³ Mary Ann Tetreault, "The Winter of the Arab Spring in the Gulf Monarchies," *Globalizations* 8 (2011): 631.

¹⁴ Sean L. Yom and F. Gregory Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23 (2012): 75.

¹⁵ Ali Rahigh-Aghsan and Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "The Rise of Iran: How Durable, How Dangerous?," *The Middle East Journal* 64 (2010): 563.

¹⁶ Toby Matthiesen, "A Saudi Spring?: The Shi'a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011-2012," *Middle East Journal* 66 (2012): 628.

¹⁷ Hasan Tariq Alhasan, "The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981: The IFLB in Bahrain," *Middle East Journal* 65 (2011): 603.

protests proved the feelings of Saudis. Al-Khalifa and other GCC countries accused Iran for its role in these protests and GCC officials made cautious declarations about Arab Spring that “Iran will exploit any weakness in the Gulf regimes to promote Shiite ascendancy and increase its power at expense of the Sunni rulers in the region. The monarchies see Iran as attempting to turn the Arab Spring into another Iranian revolution.”¹⁸

The responses of these GCC countries are two folds. First one is economic that governments began to distribute money directly and indirectly by housing, health care, and free education etc... Oil-made money is being used to make citizens happy so they do not revolt. This is very crucial in fact to calm down the tensions. All of the GCC countries are rich enough to give good quality life to their citizen. Let`s leave this issue to talk later to explain in more detail.

Moreover, key factor in GCC countries to overcome Arab Spring lies in the ruling family structures and tribal features that shape these GCC countries for a long time. It is famous for a Middle Eastern person to honor himself for being a member of a large family or tribe. Tribal life is one of the key elements in Arab life. For centuries this structure was evolved. Even at the beginning of Islam, these features can be seen as tribal competitions. Before discovery of oil, many Gulf Monarchies was established as tribal sheikhdoms across the region. These tribal ties are very strong in GCC countries “where the core of the political elite always consists of members of the ruling family. The remaining members of the elite are drawn from other wealthy, aristocratic families.”¹⁹In the region, when ruling family is so large such as Qatar, they directly occupy the main posts and ministries to run the country. When they are small they use marriages to expand ruling family and make deals with wealthy families to share their power in ruling the country. For this purpose, “carrot and stick” policy are used to keep these close alliances.²⁰

“No representation without taxation”²¹ just gets its meaning when it is applied to GCC countries. Oil money made these Hereditary Oil Monarchies to survive until current time and even from Arab Spring. There are rentier states and semi-rentier states. While Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE are rentier states, others like Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen are semi-rentier states.²² Rentier means to earn money from rents of the oil. Main source of income of these countries are from oil. Although some of them have been trying to create other economic sectors lately, still most of their incomes come from oil. They have investments in western countries. They have many migrant workers who came from semi-rentier states. Therefore, rentier economy is still vital to central oil producing countries and periphery states. By not being able to create multifunctional economic systems, these rentier states always have fear of resentment to their monarchic ruling

¹⁸ Brandon Friedman, “Battle For Bahrain: What One Uprising Meant for the Gulf States and Iran,” *World Affairs* March/April (2012): 75-77.

¹⁹ James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York:HarperCollinsCollegePublisher, 1994), 104.

²⁰ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 241.

²¹ Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93.

²² Edwards Beverly Milton, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East* (London: Wiley, 2011), 96.

systems. So subsidizing the economy becomes regular even after Arab Spring started, most of the rentier states began to distribute oil money by increasing salaries and giving extra benefits to their citizens. At this point it is important to mention that Qatar has close to 2 million populations, Bahrain has 1.3 million, UAE has around 8 million, Oman has close to 3 million, and Kuwait has 3 million. All these rentier states have ability to support or make their citizen happy by giving extra money. It seems they will be able to control their monarchic rules by using oil money. Although these GCC states do not give full democratic participation in ruling system, most of the citizens do not claim to have it as long as they have good conditions economically. So we need to keep it in our mind that Arab Spring has economic and politic dimensions. Tunisia has both, Libya has political, Egypt has both, Yemen has both, and Syria has both. But, these GCC rentier states have just political reasons. Small population gives skills to control internal unrest easily by these GCC states except Saudi Arabia that has larger army to keep unrests under control.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

When people want to talk about the history of the formation of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they have to consider giving wide attention to the Wahhabi branch of Hanbali sect of Islam. Muhammad ibn Saud was the founder of this kingdom in the small town of central Arabia in Najd. Ibn Saud discovered the Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was the founder of Wahhabi movement in that time. Wahhab was the religious person who followed the Hanbali sect of Islam. He trained himself with the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah. Taymiyyah was opposing different religious practices which were named as non-Islamic by him. Wahhabis centered their belief system on monotheistic ideas which were called Tawhid and they also labeled themselves as Muwahhidin.²³ They enlarge their influence without notice of the foreigners but everybody began to learn things about them when they invaded and destroyed the Shi'a holy sites in Karbala because according their ideas there should not be tombs to worship. This ideology also affected future behaviors of them. They began to destroy many tombs of the companions of the prophet.

With the help of Wahhabi followers, Ibn Saud expanded his reign. Even, they defeated Ottoman army and forced Oman to pay taxes. They began to attack British ships in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Saudis was stopped by Ottoman governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali. Ali sent his son Tusun to defeat Muwahhidin armies. Although he captured holy cities, he could not defeat them all. His brother Ibrahim Pasha occupied their center and imprisoned Abdallah ibn Saud Al Saud and Wahhabi Shaykh. Both were sent to Cairo and later on to Istanbul. Abdallah was executed in Istanbul. Early 19th century witnessed these clashes. After defeating Muwahhidin army, Ottomans appointed Abdallah's brother as the ruler of the region. In 1823-24 his cousin reorganized the Saudi family and moved their center to Riyadh where is still the capital city of Saudi Arabia. Fights among Saudi families for crown continued until 1902 the time of Abd al Aziz.

²³ Author uses this chapter as main source. Sebastian Maisel, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. David E. Long, Bernard Reich, and Mark Gasiorowski (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 91-123.

He began his campaign to enlarge his reign. He captured Hail from Rashidis and Al-Hasa from Turks. From then on the conflict took different direction when WWI broke out between Britain and Ottomans. Famous spies Lawrence of Arabia and John B. Philby were at work to provoke Aziz and other Arab tribes against Ottomans. But Ibn Rashids took Ottoman side so British spies tried to convince Aziz and Sherif Hussein to fight against Rashids.²⁴ Therefore Aziz attacked Rashids and captured their lands. Hussein attacked railroads which supplied Ottomans with logistics. After the war, Aziz used his ikhwan army to push Hussein out of Arabia and he succeeded. By 1932 he achieved to unify the lands and he tried to implement modern type development projects which were denied by wahhabis. In 1938 oil was discovered. With the help of oil money Aziz increased his modernization projects to create modern Saudi Arabia.

During the WWII, Saudi Arabia did not have regular army and towards the end of the war it declared war on Germany but did not fight. Arabia took the initiatives to create UN and became founding members of it. In 1953, Aziz died and his son Saud became the leader but he was not successful as his father. He could not manage the oil incomes so he began to share power with his brother Faisal. Later on, Faisal became the only leader after Saud left the country. Faisal was very experienced statesman starting his career just after the WWI by representing his father in England. In 1930 he was chosen as the foreign minister.

He was the one attended UN formation in 1945 at San Francisco. He was anti-communist not because of close relations with the US but he believed in that communism was against Islam. He took western side during the Cold War. Also, he was against Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1967 war. He tried to effect Palestinian cause. But when he used oil embargo after 1973 war against western support of Israel, his nephew assassinated him in 1975. His brother Khalid became the leader and in 1979 radical Islamist captured Haram Mosque and with the help of American soldiers they were killed. In 1982 he died and King Fahd became the king. Fahd introduced new systems to catch modernization of the state. He made new laws for more public participation in politics. He created Consultative Assembly. Also he wanted to be active in foreign relations to. Unsatisfying results of the Oslo accords led his to offer his own peace plans but they were rejected by the US and Israel. His successor Abdallah did the same offers but no results.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new regional threats emerged. Saddam`s invasion of Kuwait created big security concern for Arabia. King Fahd cooperated with US led coalition forces to liberate Kuwait from Saddam`s forces. After this event, radical Islamic groups such as Al-Qaida began to threaten social and political structure of the region. Many young Saudis fought in Afghanistan against Soviets and after the war they came to Saudi Arabia and felt as marginalized community. So their critics of the regional governments and also for Saudis became

²⁴ Mohammad Iqbal, “*Emergence of Saudi Arabia* (A Political Study of Malik Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud 1901–1953)”, Kashmir, (Sadiyah Publishers, 1977), 44.

high level concern for stability of the regions. This issue began to be international when those terrorist groups began to attack US army personnel in Arabia and other regional countries. This international terrorism reached its zenith when they attacked the World Trade Centers in New York and Pentagon. 15 of the hijackers were Saudi Arabia citizens. Western countries began to label Saudis as terrorist supporter so Saudis felt isolated so they refused to cooperate during the Iraqi Invasion in 2003. After this, many terrorist acts happened in Saudi Arabia by Al-Qaida. Those attacks mostly targeted foreigners who work at the embassies or military compounds.

At the same time, government made 60\$ Billions arms deal with the US in 2010.²⁵ But Wikileaks documents showed that the US believed that the Saudi governments were the main supporter of Sunni terrorist groups worldwide. After all these events, Arab Spring began to strike most of the region. Saudis felt obliged to help Bahrain for military support to crush down opposition. King Abdallah tried to secure his position by distributing large amount of money to society. On the other hand, Saudis see Iran as another threat to regional stability so they helped to organize opposition groups in Syria to defeat Assad's regime which has close ties with Iran.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has 29 million populations which include 6 million foreign workers. In modern understanding the country does not have constitution but it does not mean there is no organized state system. Most of the government high rank positions are held by king's family members. Quran is the main source of legislative system. It hosts the holiest sites of Islam, Mecca and Madina, Islamic culture widespread. Saudis earned most of their money, before exploring oil, from pilgrimage. All the Muslims who have good health and enough money have to visit these holy places so it creates big economic benefits. Oil has the biggest share after finding. Now it constitutes 75% income of the country and 90% export material. Saudi Arabia is the largest oil exporting country in the world. Its GDP is \$24000.²⁶ King's family is so large that all the family members run certain posts. Economic development is always on the top of their agenda also the Islamic life is very concerned.

Wahhabi ideas have opponents from Sunni and Shi'a groups of the country. Religious clashes are expected very often. Especially, in Yemen and Bahrain, Saudis felt to involve in clashes because in Bahrain Shi'a population has the majority. Thus, Saudis wanted to secure themselves and regional stability. They helped Muslims worldwide. Islamic awareness is very important for them. Also Arab unity is another policy for them. They always wanted to help Palestinian cause, Lebanese clashes, and other regional conflicts. Even they support Iran against Israel. Negotiation among Arab nations should be main target for them. Even for this, Saudis did not allow US troops to attack Iraq through their lands so US military moved to Qatar.

It seems Saudi Arabia is trying to secure itself from Arab Spring. It has large standing army loyal to the king. Since king's family is so large to run the country, it is hard to change political structure of the country. Its help in Bahrain and hosting

²⁵ Adam ENTOUS, "Saudi Arms Deal Advances", *The Wall Street Journal*, (12 September 2010).

²⁶ U.S, Department of State Diplomacy in Action, *U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia*, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Fact Sheet, (August 23, 2013).

Yemen's defeated ruler Salih is another example that Saudis have money and army to keep themselves in power. On the other hand, Saudis are enjoying welfare benefits so distribution of the oil income is another reason for political stability. Although it is similar to Libya economic terms but it is not enough to say the same thing for Saudi Kingdom because of very strong tribal ties and sectarian alliance as Wahhabis. Saudi Arabia unlike other regional countries has an institutionalized state running system. Nobody knows exactly how the king's tribe runs the country. Also, its role during the Cold War and strong ties with western countries gave another power to Saudis although their credit decreased after terrorist activities of Saudi origin groups. But, still there is some hesitation on the Saudi side that Arab Spring might come to their country too. Thus they support Syrian opposition groups to gain more support from the Sunni block, and support Palestinians to be on the scene as the one of the members of the regional family. It is probably that if there is going to be a real democratic wave in the region Saudis must consider to change the ruling type of the country.

Gulf

The region has a long historical background. Magan Kingdom in Oman and Dilmun in Bahrain. The region was famous for trade, fishing and pearling. People enlarged their trade routes to China. The region became part of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand maritime trade witnessed competition between Arabs and Spanish-Portuguese sailors in 15th and 16th centuries. This rivalry was accompanied by British Empire and Dutch in 17th and 18th centuries. Since the region was on the trade route to China and India before the opening of Suez Canal, both Britain and France competed to dominate the region. Napoleon's desire for hegemony in the region forced Britain to start close relations with tribes and kingdoms. Therefore, Britain signed a treaty with Oman in 1788. After European involvement in the region, privateering became widespread among Arabs to counter this trend. Britain signed an agreement with local rulers to stop privateering and with this treaty Britain started its official presence in the region by 1819. With this treaty, Britain began to control the region by imposing regulations on tribal relations which witnessed many clashes and the Trucial System started. Even Britain became protectorate of ruler of Bahrain in 1861 and British political agents started to live in those kingdoms. Similar agreements followed Kuwait in 1899 and Qatar in 1916.

Britain established a naval base at the gate of the Gulf. Qism Island and later on Henjam Island became the base. But British presence in the Gulf was challenged by Reza Shah in 1930s so Britain moved its naval base to Bahrain's al-Jufair Island until 1971 and it became the US 5th fleet after British withdrawal from the Gulf. Britain looked at the region from the perspective of securing the trade routes to India via Eastern Arabia until the discovery of oil in Bahrain 1932, Kuwait in 1938, Qatar in 1940, Abu Dhabi in 1958, and Oman in 1964. After oil exploitation, the region became more important than before but this time Britain lost its influence in the region. After WWII, regional countries began to have independence starting with Kuwait in 1961 and others in 1970s.²⁷

²⁷ James Onley, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971," *Journal of Social Affairs* 22 (2005): 30-43. And Jill Crystall, "Eastern Arabian States," in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North*

GCC FIVE COUNTRIES

Kuwait

Kuwait was established by the Bani Utub tribe from central Arabia during late 17th and early 18th centuries. Because of its hot and dry climate, people began to earn their livings from the sea by pearling. Many small tribes immigrated to these lands and after that they have chosen Al Sabah family to run their establishment. All of these families were Sunni origin but early 20th century witnessed Shi`an immigration to Kuwait from Iran and became the one to fifth population. In 1938 oil was discovered. First commercial oil export started in 1946. Later on, Kuwait became independent from Britain in 1961.²⁸

Immigration from other poor Arabian states and India and Pakistan increased. Expatriate workers then and now covers half of the population but with no political power because they do not have citizenship. Also many Palestinians moved to Kuwait and since they are Arab origin they began to have good positions inside governments. However, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait changed this dynamic and after liberation Kuwait expelled most of the Palestinian workers because of their support for Saddam during the invasion. Also there is another group inside the country called “*bidun*” which they do not have citizenship. When registration for citizenship started after the formation of the state, these people did not register themselves so they did not have status. Some of them later on signed and most of them work in police and military organizations. During the invasion some of them left the country so they do not have right to turn back to Kuwait because of feeling of Kuwait about their help to Saddam.

Kuwait depends on oil income. Government distributes oil money by direct giving and housing. Also health care, education, subsidization, and being state employee whoever wants to have government job they can get job from government. Kuwait tries to diversify its economic investments so it created Reserve Fund for Future Generations. This fund began to invest oil money in other countries mainly western ones. But this system showed the weaknesses of the economic and political structure of the country by make huge loss of money. Lack of transparency and regulation and control mechanisms forced Kuwait to implement new rules for investing government money. Iraqi invasion in 1990 halted everything until liberation. After the war, it started huge recovery program by privatizing the state owned companies. By 2005 it began to make good money from rising oil prices but in 2009 global economic problems hit Kuwait and it was the only country in the region to rescue a bank from bankruptcy.

Kuwait has the oldest constitution among GCC countries. It is constitutional monarchy. State has ministries and the most important ones are run by Sabah family members such as defense, internal, foreign etc. there is national assembly which has 50

Africa, ed. David E. Long, Bernard Reich, and Mark Gasiorowski (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 161-205.

Also W. Taylor Fain, *American ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008). Can be used for detail informations about the background of the Gulf Region.

²⁸ Jill Crystal, “Eastern Arabian States,” in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. David E. Long, Bernard Reich, and Mark Gasiorowski (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 161-205.

members elected for four years. There is a free election system. There are Islamic oriented and Shi`a political groups. Also, women have suffrage. Assembly has power to use on government and even on ruling family as it was seen during the accession of Al Sabah as Prime Minister. There is also very strong local government structure which enables politicians to practice politics before actively involved in general one. Liberals are Sunni and there are 9 Shi`a members of the parliament.²⁹ People can criticize government and ruling family freely. It has civil law system and there is no separate Shari`a courts.

Bahrain

Bahrain is consisted of islands. Bahrain has small population which is the smallest among GCC countries. It has just over 1 million population. 70% is original Bahraini and rest is expatriate workers. This is opposite of other GCC countries. Founding family is Al Khalifah from Bani Utub tribe which ruled Kuwait. Family is Sunni origin while 70% of the population is Shi`a. Shi`as are divided in two different groups. Most of them are Arab origin and also Iranian origin. Most of them are Twelvers but they are following different imams throughout the region. They are being discriminated politically and socially. They are kept far away from serving in military and occupy limited official posts. After Iranian revolution there were revolts so government prevented these uprisings and made plans to decrease their influence in governmental issues. So Bahrain tried to increase its Sunni population by giving much Iraqis citizenship during Iran-Iraq war.

Bahrain is one of the earliest countries in the region to develop oil based industry. However, oil production is lower than others so Bahrain oil resources are becoming less than before. So Bahrain is trying to diversify its economy by creating other industries. Oil shares half of the total income. Oil refinery was very important to make money since Saudi oils have been refined in Bahrain`s plants. Another type of investment was Aluminum plants. It became very important element in exporting materials. Also Shipbuilding and Repairing added more income to its economy. Banking was another type after Lebanese civil war. Also tourism benefitted from its neighboring Saudi Arabia.

On the political agenda, Bahrain is the most cautious country of the region because of its Shi`a majority. Thus it was reluctant to implement more liberal policies in terms of politics. In 1999, Isa Al Khalifah became the ruler with his promises for more liberal policies. He gave suffrage to women and lifted media bans, forgave political prisoners, and security law was lifted. After a while, all the reforms were stopped. Al Wifaq is major Shi`a group. Islamic action society is another one. Giving salaries to imams created another dilemma for Shi`a opposition groups in 2006. There are Shi`a and Sunni courts. There are 100 offshore banks and 28 Islamic banks so financial industry is count for 25% income of the country.³⁰

²⁹ Kuwait - Majles al-Ommah (National Assembly) - Elections in 2009", International Parliamentary Union. 2009. Retrieved 2012-02-04.

³⁰ Ahmad, Abdel-Rahman Yousri, "Islamic Banking Modes of Finance: Proposals for Further Evolution", Munawar Iqbal and Rodney Wilson (eds.), Islamic Perspectives on Wealth Creation, (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 32-3.

Qatar

Its size approximately is 100 km wide and 200 km length with little islands. Its population (1,845,475) is close to 2 million and 400,000 are only the citizens other are expatriate workers. Most of them are Sunni branch of Hanbali school and 20% are Shi'a origin. Its GDP per capita is almost \$100,000³¹ so it makes Qatar number one in the world. This prosperity comes from oil and recently from natural gas resources. Qatar has the largest deposits of natural gas and it is the third reserves. Early 90s Qatar began to pump gas. Its political structure displays differences than others in the region. Al Thani family has been running the country from 19th century on. According to the constitution, ruler must be from this family. Family members are responsible for their ministries and they have elected and appointed body of advice giver people. Number one difference of Qatar's politics is that ruler is the hegemonic but other members of the family which has strong personality can run their own ministries by themselves without being influenced by the ruler, amir. Therefore, state does not have sole political agenda such as US forces are in Qatar at the same time Al-Jazeera TV. This condition caused the second difference which is the instability of ruling system. There were many coups among ruling family.

It has been trying to put more liberal political system into practice after the first Gulf War. There is Ministry Council which is appointed by the ruler and Advisory Council which is elected body. For the latter there is liberalization. In 1995, Hamad lifted the censorship and established Al-Jazeera network. Of course this new media corporation has been very careful not to criticize Qatari governments and ruling family but other Arab governments and other countries. There is no political party and protests and gatherings are strictly forbidden. Military power of country is controlled by the Amir directly. Also Qatar transformed its judicial system from two (Sharia and Civil) to one system in 2007.

United Arab Emirates

It is consisted of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujayrah, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaymah, and Umm al-Qaywayn scattered on the Hurmuz strait of the Persian Gulf. Abu Dhabi is the largest and the richest emirate of the UAE. Dubai is the second rich emirates with its well-designed business structures. There are six tribes that dominate the ruling families of the emirates. Bani Yas is ruling the Abu Dhabi and Dubai. All of them are Sunni origin. Before oil it was the land of merchants. Free trade was very common for UAE.

Its economy is based on oil incomes. Its GDP per capita is around \$48,000. It has the 10% oil reserves of the world. Its population is around 8 (5) million which included 6 million non-citizens.³² There are many South Asian expatriate workers which consist of 50% of the population. 80% of the population is Sunni origin and 16% is Shi'a. Dubai with its free market economy and worldwide investment projects attract the attention of the world business elite but it witnessed economic recession

³¹ Christopher Dickey, "Qatar", *Newsweek*, (May 22, 2013). <http://mag.newsweek.com/2013/05/22/the-al-jazeera-revolution.html>

³² Beth Greenfield, *The World's Richest Countries*, *Forbes*, (22 February 2012)

during 2009 that forced it to borrow and postpone its debts from and to Abu Dhabi. This is another dimension in the Arab spring that one emirate or state helps others to secure political system. Otherwise it will cause public resentment. The ruler of Abu Dhabi is the president and the Dubai's ruler becomes Vice President of the UAE. These two emirates have the veto power in administration of the UAE. Federal National Council also witnesses the power dimension that gives different number to each emirate, big ones get more while smalls get fewer members.

Each emirate has its own intelligence, military and police forces. There is no unified military power. Also, Egyptians and Palestinians occupied the most of the judicial posts. There is Islamic court which deals with murder, theft, adultery, drug etc... Since there are many foreign workers also this means many problems associated with these workers. Mostly, abuses and nonpayment are main dilemmas so government tries to solve this problem to escape worldwide criticism. On the political side, UAE tried to escape from pressure of political liberalization.

Dubai is the leading emirate to diversify economy. It tries to build its own trading enterpot to attract companies for free trade. Also it creates food processing and cement factories. Although its climate is not suitable for agriculture, Dubai invests money for high-tech systems to produce its own agricultural products and it is successful to do that. Fishing is another type of industry that makes the UAE self-sufficient. Tourism is the latest developing sector. Dubai and other emirates are investing oil incomes to build infrastructures for tourism. Climate makes UAE is one of the first destination during the holiday seasons for Europeans. Dubai becomes the financial center after receiving the oil-made money of the gulf countries. Because of transparency and free market economy established by retired person of the Bank of England. No-tax on profits, free foreign ownerships, foreign exchange is very important factors for this development.

Oman

Oman has around 3 million populations which includes 10-15% expatriates workers that counts the least among Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE.³³ Its economy is more moderate than other GCC countries so there are not many immigrant workers. More than half of the population belongs to Ibadhi branch of Kharijism which dates back to 7th century rivalry among Muslims. Mostly, people live in capital city Muscat, Matrah and commercial center Ruhi. Green Mountain separates inner and coastal living areas.

After Sultan Qabus began to rule the country, Oman saw rapid economic developments. Copper mining and oil refinery, cement factories were established. However, oil is still the main income source which constitutes 40%. Oil production is decreasing and according to estimates oil will be out of production within 20 years.³⁴ Thus Oman is investing in tourism more often to diversify economy.

Politics in Oman shows differences comparing to other GCC countries. Qabus does not share his authority with anyone even with his own family member. He is the prime minister, ministers of defense, finance, foreign affairs. Another

³³Mary Robinson, "Jobs in Oman", Expat Finder, (Jun 11, 2012).

³⁴ Simon Rogers, Ami Sedghi, "How Fitch, Moody's and S&P Rate Each Country's Credit Rating". The Guardian, (15 April 2011).

dilemma is that since he does not share his power this condition does not give opportunity of statecraft experiences for future possible ruler candidates. Although he advised his family to choose the one from two people from his close relatives, the future of governing the country is uncertain.

Oman has developed some sort of local advising councils to give advices to local ruler and Sultan Qabus. In 1996 Qabus declared a new decree to describe new roles for sultan and legislative and judicial authorities. Upper and lower house for legislative are responsible for economic and social issues. For judicial body, there is Sharia court for personal matters. Three step justice systems are starting with six appeal courts and Supreme Court. Latest part in judicial system is Sultan himself. Local administrations were established and given more freedom to run rural areas. Oman has 43,000 military personnel.³⁵ Ruling family, tribes, the expatriate advisers, and the merchant class are the main elements for Oman politics. Running huge rural areas with its 3 million populations is easy for Sultan Qabus³⁶ because by giving more power to local administrations he is trying to decrease the power of tribes. By controlling all economic activities he dominates the politics. Therefore it is hard to organize opposition forces against him. The small opposing groups were arrested before. For short time of the period the political system will stay as same now.

Conclusion

1970s brought prosperity and danger to the region. Oil embargo and rising oil prices created huge amount of money. On the other hand Iranian revolution increased the feeling of threat to the region. Shi'a policy of expansion to other Muslim countries created fear among Gulf Cooperation Council states. Especially Bahrain with its Shi'a majority and Sunni rule became interesting example for other countries. Gulf witnessed security tightening. Official creation of GCC by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia was the result of this Shi'a threat. Iran-Iraq war created another dilemma and GCC supported Iraq. During the war, Kuwait lost many oil tankers thus US helped by letting them to use American flags on the ships. However, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 brought another threat. GCC countries opposed this and joined US led coalition forces to save Kuwait.

After this war, GCC countries began to improve political liberties. Kuwait parliament was reopened, Qatar rewrote its constitution by new ruler Prince Hamad, Isa Al Khalifah led assembly to be reopened after he became ruler of Bahrain, and Sultan Qabus tried to ease the tension in Oman by implanting little liberal policies. However, the situation in the region was changed by US invasion of Iraq in 2003. On the contrary of estimations to finish the war in Iraq within few months, turmoil in Iraq continued until 2009. Withdrawal of US forces did not finish clashes among Sunni-Shi'a groups. But majority rule became Shi'a. Regional countries began to fear of undemocratic type of ruling systems that they have.

³⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U. S. Policy" Congressional Research Service, (Diane Publishing, 2011),8.

³⁶Brian Whitaker, "Oman's Sultan Qaboos: a classy despot", The Guardian, (4 March 2011).

Hereditary Oil Monarchies was caught with the Arab Spring and immediately tried to stop that reaching to them. The strong regional cooperation between GCC, hereditary monarchies for long years, using oil money to protect regime against public, international assistance from USA, and European Union for now, saved GCC countries from Arab Spring.

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