



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: [www.ijirss.com](http://www.ijirss.com)



## Addressing security challenges: Strategic approaches of Arab gulf states

 Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh<sup>1</sup>,  Rasha Adnan Mubiadeen<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Politics and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Basic Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.*

Corresponding author: Rasha Adnan Mubiadeen (Email: [r.mubiadeen@zu.edu.jo](mailto:r.mubiadeen@zu.edu.jo))

### Abstract

This study examines their strategic behavior, focusing on hedging, neutrality, and alliance-building as key approaches to ensuring sovereignty and stability. The article utilizes the following research approaches: Decision-Making Approach, Descriptive-Analytical Method, Regional Systems Approach, Geographical Scope, and Temporal Scope. The findings show that while Oman adopts a policy of neutrality to balance relations, Bahrain and the UAE align closely with major powers for security guarantees. The results indicate that Qatar emphasizes international alliances and mediation to preserve its autonomy, whereas Kuwait employs a diplomatic balancing act, mediating disputes and fostering regional integration. Conducting a study on addressing security challenges and strategic approaches of Arab Gulf states is one of the main implications. These strategies reflect a spectrum of pragmatic approaches, allowing these nations to navigate regional rivalries and global power shifts while maintaining national independence. This study underscores the critical role of adaptive policies in securing the sovereignty of small states within a volatile geopolitical environment.

**Keywords:** Alliance, Dynamic, GCC, Hedging, Security, Strategies.

**DOI:** 10.53894/ijirss.v8i1.4807

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**History:** Received: 2 January 2025/Revised: 4 February 2025/Accepted: 13 February 2025/Published: 19 February 2025

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Publisher:** Innovative Research Publishing

### 1. Introduction

The Gulf states, encompassing Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman, confront unique and multifaceted security challenges due to their limited geographic size, small populations, and absence of strategic depth. These inherent vulnerabilities expose them to continuous security pressures from major regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. The resulting geopolitical tensions necessitate innovative and multifaceted strategies to safeguard their sovereignty and stability in a volatile regional landscape [1].

Each Gulf state employs tailored security policies shaped by its political and geographical circumstances. Bahrain, the smallest and least strategically buffered, heavily depends on alliances with regional and international powers, leveraging external military presence during crises. Qatar, positioned between the competing influences of Saudi Arabia and Iran, prioritizes mediation and neutrality in its foreign policy while anchoring its security on international alliances, particularly with the United States.

Oman, with its strategic control of the Strait of Hormuz and access to three seas, has cultivated a policy of neutrality and non-alignment, allowing it to maintain balanced relations with competing regional actors. In contrast, the UAE has adopted a proactive foreign policy, engaging in regional crises to safeguard its security and expand its influence. Kuwait, leveraging its unique position, emphasizes neutrality and diplomacy to mediate regional disputes and foster stability.

This study aims to analyze the diverse strategies these Gulf states adopt to address their security concerns. By examining their perceptions of national security and the policies they employ to achieve stability, this research offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamic approaches these states utilize to navigate the complexities of their regional and international environments. Central to the analysis is the question: How do these small states adapt their security strategies to respond to shifting regional and international conditions? Addressing this inquiry involves exploring their behavior and strategic decision-making to ensure sovereignty and mitigate external threats within a turbulent geopolitical context.

When the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait) were established in the early 1970s, they represented some of the smallest nations globally in terms of land area. The combined population of these countries barely exceeded one million at the time. These states joined the United Nations amid intense debates over whether such small entities could be regarded as sovereign states under international law and whether they could fulfill the obligations of UN membership. There was also significant concern about how the proliferation of small sovereign states with voting rights in the UN General Assembly could distort the bipolar international order and undermine the balance of power during the Cold War. This study addresses the research problem by answering the following questions:

- What strategies do GCC political systems adopt to ensure their national security and stability in their regional environment?
- What approaches do these countries use to maintain their security?
- How do Gulf states interact with the broader international community?

Small states have not received adequate attention in academic research regarding the strategies they employ to protect their security and mitigate the structural constraints imposed by the international system. Small states are unable to defend themselves independently through conventional defensive strategies due to the significant structural imbalances between them and potential adversaries or coercive powers. To address these challenges, small states often resort to "militarizing the state," turning the entire nation into a security-focused entity dominated by defense-oriented policies. This heightened sense of security awareness perpetuates their dependence on donor countries or states that manufacture tools for defense and security, whether in reality or as a perceived necessity. Small states may also opt to join regional and international alliances or declare neutrality.

International theoretical frameworks have traditionally emphasized that small states' behavior is often reactive, shaped by the anarchic structure of the international system. These states are typically not involved in the historical processes that alter the global hierarchy of power. Given this context, the study aims to:

- Examine the behavior of small states within the international system, with a specific focus on the six GCC countries.
- Explore the modern security approaches adopted by Gulf states to preserve their security and adapt to structural changes within the international system.

The evolving structure of the international system and its environment has facilitated the dominance of major powers and rising forces [2]. These changes have heightened the vulnerability of small states to external threats, prompting them to develop and adopt alternative strategies to ensure their survival. Small states often turn to internal or regional strategies to alleviate international pressures. The significance of this study lies in addressing a critical topic concerning the security perceptions and strategies of Gulf states and their implications, providing valuable insights into this vital area.

## **2. Method**

To address the study's themes, the researcher employs a multidisciplinary approach, utilizing the following methods:

### *2.1. Decision-Making Approach*

This method examines the political circumstances surrounding decision-makers in the Gulf states, analyzing their decision-making processes and the foundations on which they base their choices.

### *2.2. Descriptive-Analytical Method*

This method describes and analyzes the nature of Gulf relations within the regional and international systems, exploring their impact on the political, military, and economic dimensions of GCC states.

### *2.3. Regional Systems Approach*

This method studies interactions among geographically adjacent states that share a complex network of political, economic, and social interactions. It emphasizes the importance of social and cultural homogeneity, regional identity, and the pursuit of solidarity and integration among system members. Importantly, the scope of the study falls between 2010 and 2024, as follows:

- Geographical Scope

The study focuses on five GCC countries: Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait.

- Temporal Scope

The study covers the period from 2010 to 2023. The year 2010 marks the beginning of the Arab Spring uprisings, while 2023 represents the conclusion of the study.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. *Small States – Their Position and Roles in the International System*

Since the establishment of nation-states following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, states have continued to seek security, survival, and ways to address internal and external challenges within the international system. Nation-states vary in size, capabilities, and levels of power, and these differences influence their behavior, ability to impact others, and status in the global community. This, in turn, affects their capacity to safeguard their national security.

The Treaty of Chaumont, following the Napoleonic Wars, explicitly named major and medium-sized powers while overlooking smaller states. With the fall of the Austrian Empire after World War I and the collapse of colonial empires during the 1960s and 1970s, the number of small states significantly increased. The term "small states" emerged, with the World Bank identifying 50 internationally recognized small states following the Cold War. These states face inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities, creating security, economic, and social challenges that compel them to develop strategies for adapting to the international reality. Small states often lack the capacity to significantly influence the international system or secure themselves by relying solely on their own resources and individual actions.

#### 3.2. *The Concept of Small States*

Political theorists David Vital and William Demas underscore the significance of quantitative criteria in defining the size of a state. According to their framework, a small state is delineated by specific thresholds: a land area of less than 10,000 square kilometers, a population below 10 million, and an economic contribution of less than 1% to the global GDP [3]. This characterization aligns with the consensus in political literature, which classifies states with limited geographic size and modest military capacities as small states, irrespective of their functional roles or international prominence.

Within the realist and liberal paradigms, scholars such as David Vital and Robert Keohane contend that small states are inherently less likely to exert significant regional influence compared to their larger counterparts [4]. A shared feature of these states is their acute awareness of their vulnerability and their limited capacity to ensure self-preservation independently. This condition, encapsulated in the "dual security theory," compels small states to seek alliances with more powerful neighbors or major international actors, aligning with the "theory of progressive engagement by major powers" [5]. The diminished external influence of small states can be attributed to their lack of fundamental power determinants, including population size, economic strength, and military capability. To mitigate these limitations, small states often adopt foreign policy strategies centered on military alliances and economic coalitions to amplify their influence [4].

Nonetheless, empirical evidence reveals that many small states possess strategic geographic advantages that surpass those of some major powers. Such geographic positioning imbues these states with considerable strategic value, enabling them to play pivotal roles in regional dynamics and balances of power. The ramifications of these roles often extend to the international arena, highlighting the disproportionate influence that some small states can wield [6].

The conceptual evolution of power, incorporating notions of soft and hard power, has further redefined the status of small states. This paradigm shift emphasizes their functional roles and strategic interdependence with larger powers, whose global influence is often incomplete without the contributions of these smaller states. Particularly, small states with substantial financial and economic resources no longer perceive themselves merely as subordinate entities or satellites of major powers. Instead, they assert their agency by undertaking diverse roles at regional and global levels, including mediators, allies, balancers, facilitators, and other influential functions [6].

#### 3.3. *International Relations Theories and Their Interpretations of Small States' Foreign Policy*

International relations theories (neo-realism, neo-liberalism, and constructivism) have sought to explain how small states behave and operate within the international system during conflicts, wars, and crises, as well as how these events influence their external behavior.

##### 3.3.1. *Realism*

The realist school posits that states operate in an anarchic world where no overarching authority exists to protect them in the event of aggression—a condition referred to as the "security dilemma." This anarchic nature fosters mistrust among states, compelling them to prioritize survival and security in what is termed "security-seeking behavior."

Realism suggests that small states pursue security primarily through their military capabilities and secondarily through alliances with regional powers and international actors [7]. Small states are always prepared to confront potential or foreseeable threats [8]. Realist theorists argue that geographic proximity to regional powers and the aggressiveness of neighboring states are the main sources of threats for small states. Neo-realism splits into two strands: offensive realism and defensive realism [9].

- Defensive Realism: Advocates that small states aim for maximum security, not dominance, and consistently seek protection from major powers through military alliances, diplomatic relations, or economic blocs. This approach reduces the security dilemma [10]. Defensive realism favors cooperative strategies over arms races or the pursuit of absolute power, emphasizing the concept of "common security" [11]. Agreements and cautious diplomacy with major

powers are viewed as the best guarantees of security, compensating for disparities in power and deterrence while mitigating the security dilemma.

- **Offensive Realism:** Contends that small states focus on relative power rather than absolute power to ensure security and national survival. This approach calls for policymakers to adopt security policies that define adversaries and enhance relative power. Offensive realism argues that international anarchy and the absence of a global governing authority provide strong incentives for expansion, as only the most powerful states can guarantee their survival [9].

As the international reality evolved towards cooperation and relative gains over purely security-driven goals, neo-realism acknowledged that international cooperation could transform an unregulated anarchic system into a "mature anarchy" governed by institutions and international laws that limit mistrust and miscalculations among states.

### *3.3.2. Liberalism*

The liberal school argues that a state's behavior and tools for action in international politics are shaped by its interdependence with neighboring states and other international actors, rather than disparities in material capabilities, as realists suggest [12].

Joseph Nye highlights that the mutual dependence of states, resulting from the division of labor, fosters peaceful cooperation, international integration, and shared interests among actors. This diminishes the relevance of military power in favor of knowledge-based power, also known as "soft power" [13]. The emergence of non-state actors and the interconnectivity of global trade have also significantly influenced states' behavior and interactions in international relations [14], determining their roles and status within the global system [15]. Neo-liberal theorist Robert Keohane emphasizes the role of international institutions in regulating states' behavior and holding actors accountable [12]. According to liberal theory, small states, given their limited influence in the international system and inability to achieve goals independently, are more inclined than powerful states to adopt international strategies. This preference stems from their limited capacity to mobilize internal and external resources rapidly or significantly. [16].

### *3.3.3. Constructivism*

Constructivism posits that human interactions are shaped by ideas rather than purely material conditions or power elements [17]. Alexander Wendt, a prominent constructivist, argues that state identities and interests are not pre-existing but are formed through social interactions. States derive their identities from the norms, values, and institutional ideas of the social environment in which they interact. Constructivists assert that a state's institutional identity shapes its primary objectives, such as security, stability, or economic development. These goals are achieved based on how the state perceives itself in relation to other states in the international community. Consequently, national interests are constructed around these identities [18].

Constructivism rejects the realist premise of international anarchy as a fixed reality. Instead, it views anarchy and power struggles as constructs created by decision-makers, not objective truths. States can manipulate this construct to serve diverse interests. Wendt famously remarked, "Anarchy is what states make of it" [19].

In contrast to realism and liberalism, constructivism approaches security from a social perspective, emphasizing that identity and actor interests are central to security. Ideas have reshaped international political agendas by focusing on human rights, the rule of law, civil society, local identities, and individuals as key factors in managing disorder. Security and risks are often politically manufactured by leaders relying on identity frameworks to categorize states as allies or enemies. Identity, therefore, underpins states' interests and behaviors, with self-help being a product of the international system's anarchic nature [9].

Constructivists argue that fear and mistrust are intrinsic to the security dilemma, making the achievement and maintenance of security particularly challenging. States remain wary of others reneging on agreements. [18].

## *3.4. Military and Security Strategies of Small States in International Relations*

Many theoretical studies suggest that only major powers initiate significant foreign policy actions, while small states often resort to policies of alignment and compliance [20]. Vital articulates this notion, stating, "Weakness is the common denominator and natural position in how a small state perceives itself" [21]. Understanding the behavior of states is a core concern of international relations theories, which have proposed numerous frameworks for how states safeguard their security and national interests. Notable theories addressing the security behavior of states include neo-realism, as championed by theorists such as Kenneth Waltz with his "balance of power" theory, Stephen Walt's "balance of threat" theory, and Randall Schweller's "balance of interests" theory.

### *3.4.1. Balance of Power and Alliance Strategy*

The central premise of the balance of power theory is that states must possess adequate military capabilities to protect their national security and vital interests. Given the anarchic nature of the international system and small states' inability to ensure their own security, each state must rely on its resources and strategies to avoid occupation or other threats. When confronted with a threatening or powerful state, a smaller state can either mobilize more resources or seek alliances with other states facing similar dangers to shift the balance of power in its favor [22].

Kenneth Waltz explains that the approach to achieving a balance of power varies based on the resources, military strength, and economic capabilities a state possesses relative to its adversaries or neighbors. For small and weak states, which lack substantial resources and global influence, policies such as alignment, neutrality, appeasement, or dependence are often the only feasible balance of power strategies [23]. However, some argue that small states are largely irrelevant in balance of



power theory, as they are often seen as pawns manipulated by great powers, with little room for independent action in the international system. The security dilemma drives small states to adopt defensive strategies and form alliances with major powers, as they perceive these policies to enhance their sense of security and ensure survival [9, 24]. Glenn Snyder emphasizes that alliances help small states avoid military threats by joining collective defense treaties or aligning militarily with major powers [25]. However, shifting interests and international relations dynamics mean that alliance strategies can be risky for small states and may not always protect them from external threats.

### 3.4.2. Balance of Threat Strategy

Stephen Walt's "Balance of Threat" theory focuses on identifying and countering the sources of threats [26]. The theory posits that small states are inherently vulnerable to threats, compelling them to adopt strategies that mitigate and counteract these threats. These strategies include forging alliances with external powers, forming international coalitions to protect their security, or strengthening their internal front to resist any external adversary [27]. This strategy is among the most effective and widely applied in international relations, as it emphasizes controlling the sources of primary threats while developing capabilities to target the vital interests of potential aggressors. Such deterrence mechanisms can effectively prevent aggression [26].

The Balance of Threat strategy, when adopted by small states, has two distinguishing features:

#### 1. Focus on Perception, Not Just Capabilities

The strategy emphasizes the role of perception, allowing small states to manipulate how larger powers view them. By influencing these perceptions, small states can dissuade larger powers from engaging in military aggression, even without possessing significant military capabilities.

#### 2. Emphasis on the Ability to Inflict Harm

Instead of striving for comprehensive power parity, the strategy focuses on the capacity to harm the critical interests of larger powers. Even in the presence of military asymmetries, a small state can deter aggression if it develops the ability to threaten the vital interests of a more powerful state, creating sufficient fear of repercussions to prevent military action [27].

When responding to a perceived threat, the threatened party can choose among three responses:

- Positive response (compliance): This occurs when the threatened state is too weak to resist.
- Negative response (resistance): This involves rejecting compliance with the threat, often undertaken when the threatened state possesses sufficient deterrent capabilities.
- Neutral Response (Ignoring the Threat): This is adopted when both parties are evenly matched [26].

The primary distinction between Balance of Power and Balance of Threat theories lies in their focus. The Balance of Power theory centers solely on military strength [28]. According to this theory, states balance against military power that threatens their security, existence, and ability to achieve national goals. It evaluates the distribution of actual capabilities among states, focusing on the size of a state's military assets compared to its neighbors and the nature of neighboring states' policies—whether offensive or defensive. Kenneth Waltz argues that small states often prefer to appease rising and powerful states rather than balance against them.

In contrast, the Balance of Threat theory asserts that states balance against perceived threats rather than sheer power. A powerful state may not necessarily pose a threat to its neighbors if it adopts non-aggressive policies. Conversely, aggressive states—regardless of their overall power—are viewed as threatening and are likely to provoke balancing efforts by other states [29]. This distinction explains why states often prioritize balancing against threatening behavior rather than simply aligning with stronger states.

### 3.4.3. Bandwagoning Strategy

The Bandwagoning Strategy aligns with the limited military capabilities of small and medium-sized states in protecting their national security, contrasting with the Balance of Power Theory, which emphasizes military capabilities to create equilibrium among major international and regional powers. Kenneth Waltz proposed a politically oriented strategy, known as "Bandwagoning," as an alternative for small and medium-sized states to avoid military threats [25]. This strategy assumes that smaller states align themselves with the policies and interests of major international and regional powers to avoid military threats and sanctions, recognizing that these powers shape the structure of the international system [25].

Proponents of the Bandwagoning Strategy argue that mutual distrust among states compels them to make high-risk decisions. One such mechanism is the "Train-Joining" approach, a survival strategy characterized by lower effort and reduced costs. This approach involves avoiding war by appeasing adversaries rather than pursuing rearmament or realignment to counter them. However, many states lack the economic resources to achieve balance and are thus forced to align with the strongest power or the most threatening entity [30].

Randall Schweller, a leading theorist of the Bandwagoning Strategy, contends that small and weak states lacking sufficient capabilities to address risks gravitate toward cost-effective alliances with powerful states when mutual interests and benefits exist. This behavior is driven by the high costs and significant risks of opposition. By aligning with stronger powers, these states safeguard their national security and interests. Schweller views bandwagoning as a voluntary strategy for weaker states, not one imposed upon them. It provides smaller states with alternative approaches, such as balancing interests and exchanging mutual benefits, wherein stronger states offer economic aid and public goods to their smaller counterparts [31].

While bandwagoning offers smaller states a means of survival, it carries significant external and internal risks:

#### 1. External Risks

Bandwagoning may embolden adversaries to take actions that weaken the state, potentially leading to chaos, instability, and even state failure, fragmenting it into smaller entities.

## 2. Internal Risks

Internally, the strategy can undermine the central government's authority, eroding its credibility among citizens and fostering opposition groups and movements that are critical of the state's policies [24].

In summary, bandwagoning provides a pragmatic yet precarious pathway for small states to navigate the complexities of the international system. It requires careful consideration of both the benefits and potential risks to ensure that alignment with stronger powers does not lead to long-term vulnerabilities or internal destabilization.

### 3.4.4. Strategic Hedging Theory

The Hedging Strategy represents a new structural theory in international relations, emerging as a response to the recommendations of the realist school, which emphasizes strategies such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. This strategy seeks to explain the foreign policies of smaller states toward major powers, offering a suitable pathway for small states with limited hard power capabilities. Hedging is adopted as a strategic option by smaller states to maintain balanced relationships with two major powers, maximize their benefits, and avoid dependence on dominant powers. Additionally, it allows these states to leverage their relative power to achieve a degree of autonomy in their foreign policy [32].

Appeasement policies toward major powers are considered the practical application of the Hedging Strategy. Many small states employ this approach to safeguard and ensure their national security [33]. The Hedging Strategy is often described as a middle ground or "third way" between security strategies that rely on conflictual mechanisms and those adopting cooperative mechanisms. It bridges the gap between strategies of power balancing and bandwagoning, as well as between hard and soft balancing, or direct confrontation and over-reliance on major powers [33].

The Hedging Strategy involves a mixed approach that integrates cooperative and conflictual mechanisms. For instance, a state may engage in cooperative relations with a threatening state to mitigate economic, political, or social risks (a soft balancing process). Simultaneously, the state can adopt military mechanisms (hard balancing) by enhancing and modernizing its military capabilities or entering counter-alliances aimed at weakening the threatening state's power and capabilities [34]. The behavior underpinning the Hedging Strategy combines elements of engagement and integration with others while emphasizing balance in the realist sense, including security cooperation and military capacity-building [33].

The Hedging Strategy occupies a position between balancing and neutrality, often employed by smaller states unwilling to commit to one of the competing major powers. Unlike neutrality, which entails abstaining from conflicts and adopting a single, non-partisan stance toward rival powers, hedging allows for simultaneous cooperation with adversarial states while maintaining alliances with their opponents [33].

A state implementing the hedging strategy must adhere to several principles to ensure its effectiveness [35]:

#### 1. Enhancing National Capabilities

The state must significantly improve its capabilities in anticipation of potential armed conflict with a leading power or other global actors. This enhancement supports the state's autonomy, particularly if it must forgo aid from dominant powers.

#### 2. Avoiding Direct Confrontation

The state should refrain from directly confronting the leading power, either by forming military alliances explicitly targeting that power (external balancing) or by focusing solely on internal military buildup (internal balancing).

#### 3. Strategic Commitment

The adoption of hedging must be a deliberate, strategic decision by the state's leadership, integrated into its national security and foreign policy frameworks. This strategy should be formalized in national security documents and policy statements.

#### 4. Economic Resource Allocation

The state must allocate sufficient economic resources to bolster its power, such as increased military spending and investment in defense industries. However, poorly planned efforts could result in negative economic repercussions or severe diplomatic crises.

### 3.5. Demographics, Strategic Challenges, and Geopolitics of the GCC States

When the State of Kuwait was established in 1962, followed by the formation of five other Gulf states (Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates) in the early 1970s, these nations ranked among the smallest globally in terms of geographic area. The combined population of these states barely exceeded one million, and no city or region within them had a population surpassing 15,000 at the time. These countries joined the United Nations amid debates on whether such small states could be considered sovereign under international law and whether they had the capacity to fulfill their membership obligations within the organization.

This table outlines the area, population (as of 2024), and percentage of foreign residents in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states:

**Table 1.**

An outline of the area, population as of 2024, and percentage of foreign residents in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

State	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Percentage of GCC total area	Population (2024, Millions)	Percentage of foreign residents (2023)
Kuwait	17,820	0.39%	4.7	69%
Oman	309,500	6.62%	5.7	40%
Qatar	11,627	1.82%	3.054	87%
Bahrain	771	0.02%	1.67	51%
UAE	71,023	0.25%	10	88%

**Source:** Statistical data from GCC states, including Qatar's Statistics and Planning Authority (2024), UAE official statistics, Oman's National Centre for Statistics and Information, Bahrain's Information and eGovernment Authority, and Kuwait's Central Statistical Bureau.

The table demonstrates that the Fifth Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are characterized by relatively small populations, collectively totaling approximately 25 million people. Among these, Bahrain and Qatar are among the smallest countries globally, particularly in terms of demographics. Bahrain's population is around 1.6 million, while Qatar's population stands at 3.054 million. In contrast, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the largest of the GCC countries in terms of population, with 10 million residents.

The Fifth Gulf states rely heavily on foreign labor to manage various aspects of public and private life while retaining key positions of authority and military leadership for nationals. Foreign workers make up 88% of the UAE's population, 87% in Qatar, and 40% in Oman. These high percentages of expatriates present significant social, economic, and security challenges. For instance, cultural distortion within these societies has been noted, alongside the outflow of billions of dollars from the region to expatriates' home countries [36].

Geographically, the GCC states are relatively small. Oman has the largest land area, followed by the UAE, while Bahrain is the smallest. Bahrain's central location in the Arabian Gulf gives it strategic accessibility from surrounding countries and international forces. However, its limited size means it lacks significant strategic depth, limiting its capacity for maneuverability during crises. This vulnerability led Bahrain to request the deployment of 1,500 GCC troops in 2011 to address the violence that erupted within its borders [37].

Qatar, positioned between two regional powers—Saudi Arabia and Iran—faces considerable geopolitical pressure. Both neighboring states have historically pursued policies of dominance over Qatar. The country's small and demographically imbalanced population, composed predominantly of expatriates, adds layers of vulnerability to its societal structure. To address these challenges, Qatar has consistently worked to develop strategies and tools aimed at mitigating its geopolitical and demographic exposure, thereby bolstering its resilience against threats and ensuring its security [38].

Kuwait's geopolitical position also places it in a precarious situation, as it is surrounded by three major regional powers: Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. This positioning has been described as forming a "pressure triangle" that has consistently shaped Kuwait's foreign policy [39]. Historical experiences reveal that these key players in the regional system have sought to extend their influence and control over smaller Gulf states, including Kuwait, reflecting the persistent pressures faced by such countries [40].

Oman stands out for its strategic location, occupying the easternmost corner of the Arabian Peninsula at the entrance to the Gulf. Oman's coastline spans three major seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea. This position grants it control over the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint for global maritime trade and navigation.

Kuwait and Bahrain, however, grapple with issues of demographic heterogeneity and weakened national allegiance. Both countries exhibit religious and cultural ties to Iran that influence political loyalty, often conflicting with the official state stance [41, 42]. Oman, in contrast, demonstrates remarkable social cohesion despite its ethnic diversity. Its population includes Arabs, Zanzibaris, Baluchis, Lawatis, Indians, Persians, Biyasiris, and others. Oman's ability to maintain a harmonious social fabric amidst such diversity is a unique achievement in the Arab world, fostering integration rather than division.

Qatar's geopolitical and demographic vulnerabilities are pronounced. The small size and imbalance of its population, along with its location between two dominant regional powers, expose the country to significant risks. Similarly, the UAE faces its own geopolitical challenge due to Iran's occupation of its three islands: Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa. This unresolved dispute underscores the enduring tensions within the region.

Geographically, the GCC states are located in a highly strategic and volatile area along the Arabian Gulf coast. The proximity of these nations to the Strait of Hormuz—a critical maritime chokepoint—further heightens their geopolitical significance. Separated from Iran by a narrow waterway, these states occupy a region of continuous strategic and security interest.

The small populations and limited geographic areas of these states impose internal security challenges, compelling political decision-makers to adopt pragmatic and realist approaches. Policymakers strive to balance the competitive advantages of their nations while simultaneously mitigating risks. By leveraging their strengths to serve national interests and proactively addressing vulnerabilities, these states aim to maintain stability and sovereignty in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

### 3.6. Balancing Security, Cooperation, and Divergence: The Strategic Dynamics of GCC States

The Fifth Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have adopted similar internal strategies to safeguard their national security, focusing on maintaining the stability and continuity of their governing political systems. These strategies emphasize adherence to foundational laws (in Qatar and Oman) and constitutions in Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE, enhancing self-

reliant defensive capabilities, fortifying internal cohesion, and expanding political participation [43]. Political development and reforms have been implemented in countries like Kuwait, Qatar [44], Bahrain (Bahrain National Charter, 2000), and Oman, along with efforts to establish a national consensus around the concept of the homeland (Bahrain National Charter, 2000).

In addition to these measures, the GCC states have embraced long-term national development strategies. Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030, Oman's Vision 2040 [45], the UAE's "Principles of the 50," and Kuwait's Vision 2035 [46] exemplify comprehensive approaches to national planning. These strategies aim to mitigate geopolitical and demographic vulnerabilities, strengthen internal cohesion, and promote political participation. They also seek to enhance the competitiveness of national economies, combat discrimination based on ideology, tribalism, or ethnicity, and preserve national unity [47]. The overarching goal is to build resilience against risks and threats, reinforce the political system, and promote public diplomacy to bolster national identity.

The GCC states view regional integration, particularly through the Gulf Cooperation Council, as a cornerstone of stability and security. Neighboring states are perceived as the first line of defense, and the broader Arab League Charter provides an additional layer of regional cooperation. However, the presence of powerful neighbors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq has heightened security concerns, including fears of Iranian expansionism, fragmentation within the GCC, and the long-term repercussions of the Arab Spring. In response, the GCC states have pursued strategies to shield themselves from major regional power struggles, sustain strategic alliances with global powers, and play influential regional roles that counteract expansionist ambitions [47].

To enhance their military capabilities, the GCC states have launched comprehensive programs focused on modernization and development. Priority has been given to air forces, air defense systems, and operational performance improvements within their armed forces. This commitment to defense reflects a recognition of the importance of maintaining a strategic edge in a volatile region.

Inter-GCC relations, however, are marked by inconsistency and flux, influenced by regional crises and developments. Over the past six years, mutual antagonism has characterized relations among Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE, despite their shared membership in the GCC. Disputes have arisen from differences in political and strategic priorities, exacerbated by the fallout from the Arab Spring.

The 2011 Arab Spring revealed stark divisions among GCC states in their responses to the uprisings across the Arab world. Qatar supported the revolutions, while Oman adopted a neutral stance, and other GCC states largely opposed the uprisings. However, the positions of these opposing states varied depending on their relationships with the ruling regimes in affected countries. For instance, while opposing the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, they supported popular movements in Syria and Libya. In the latter cases, they even endorsed armed groups seeking to overthrow the ruling regimes [48].

Tensions escalated significantly on June 5, 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a comprehensive blockade, including air, land, and sea restrictions. The blockading states issued Qatar a list of demands, including severing ties with Iran, shutting down Al Jazeera, and halting support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar was given ten days to comply or face further escalation [49]. The blockade persisted for four years, ending in January 2021 with the Al-Ula Agreement. However, Bahrain did not restore its relations with Qatar until two years later.

Iran's influence in the region also plays a critical role in intra-GCC tensions. Relations between Iran and several GCC states are characterized by conflict, driven primarily by two factors: Iran's policy of exporting its Islamic Revolution and its sectarian agenda. These factors have been a source of concern for Bahrain and Kuwait, where Iran's sectarian influence poses internal challenges. Conversely, Oman and Qatar maintain political and economic ties with Iran, adopting pragmatic approaches to their relations [50]. Kuwait, despite occasional tensions, has signed several agreements to facilitate trade and maintain stable relations with Tehran [51].

The UAE's relationship with Iran reflects a dual approach. While Iran occupies three Emirati islands—Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa—the UAE has maintained robust economic relations with Tehran. Iran is the UAE's fourth-largest trading partner, with over 10,000 Iranian companies operating in the Emirates, making the UAE Iran's second-largest trading partner [51].

Relations with Turkey also highlight the diverse foreign policies within the GCC. While Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar have cultivated cooperative relationships with Turkey based on shared interests and regional stability, Bahrain and the UAE oppose Turkey's presence in the Gulf [52].

Oman's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE are similarly complex and variable. Tensions have arisen over Oman's neutral stance during the Yemeni conflict and its refusal to join the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in 2015. Oman has hosted diplomatic negotiations involving various Yemeni factions, viewing the Saudi-Emirati military presence near its borders as a potential threat to its national security [53]. Relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia improved significantly after Sultan Haitham bin Tariq assumed power. His first official visit was to Saudi Arabia in July 2021, followed by a visit from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Oman in December 2021 [54, 55].

From 2014 to 2017, two distinct blocs emerged within the GCC regarding regional policies. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE formed one bloc, while Qatar and Oman constituted the other. This division became particularly evident during the 2017 Gulf crisis and the subsequent blockade of Qatar. Meanwhile, Kuwait positioned itself as a mediator, seeking to balance and stabilize relations among GCC states [56].

Despite Oman's differing foreign policy from Bahrain and the UAE, it has aligned with them on certain issues, such as normalizing relations with Israel. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Muscat in 2018 and was



received by Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Oman also maintained balanced diplomatic relations with Syria during the Syrian crisis. While voting to suspend Syria's Arab League membership in 2011, Oman kept its embassy in Damascus open and continued diplomatic exchanges with Syria [24].

### *3.7. Strategic Approaches of GCC States: Navigating Regional Complexities and Global Alliances*

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, have adopted hedging strategies in their foreign relations with major regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran. The security environment in the Gulf is marked by instability and uncertainty, prompting these states to maintain strategic flexibility and maneuverability in their foreign policies. Oman, in particular, stands as a prominent example of strategic hedging in the Gulf region. Its foreign policy rejects militarization and the use of force, except in self-defense, and adheres to principles of positive neutrality by avoiding alliances and power blocs [57].

Oman's approach to foreign policy significantly diverges from that of other GCC states due to its distinct geopolitical and historical context. Oman's unique strategic calculations stem from its historical interactions with Britain, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, shaping its independent stance on regional developments for over 250 years. Its multi-layered foreign policy balances external relations through alliances and pragmatic engagement. For instance, Oman aligns with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and GCC members to counter perceived threats, particularly from Iran, while maintaining diplomatic and commercial ties with Tehran to avoid direct confrontation [58].

Despite its reliance on a security alliance with the United States, Oman sustains robust economic, security, and political relations with Iran. This balance allows Oman to remain neutral in regional disputes involving Iran, such as the Yemen conflict, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and the Syrian crisis. Simultaneously, Oman engages in mutual investments with GCC countries, exemplifying its hedging strategy by balancing relations with regional and international powers while prioritizing its sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

The UAE has pursued a proactive and unconventional foreign policy approach, departing from traditional norms and protocols. Over the past decade, it has adopted an aggressive and interventionist stance, engaging directly in Arab-Arab conflicts to align with its political objectives. Notable examples include its support for the Syrian revolution (2011), participation in the Peninsula Shield Force to suppress Bahrain's uprising, involvement in the coalition to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and financial and military support for Khalifa Haftar's forces in Libya. The UAE also played a pivotal role in the 2013 military coup in Egypt, backing President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and participated in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, occupying parts of the country in the Al-Mahra and Socotra regions. Additionally, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt in the blockade of Qatar in 2017 [6].

In recent years, the UAE has scaled back its military interventions, withdrawing troops from Yemen and reducing support for Haftar's forces in Libya and its presence in Eritrea and Somalia by 2020. However, the UAE continues to support the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan and leverages neighboring countries like Chad and Libya to funnel resources to these forces [59]. Its national security strategy emphasizes confrontation through strategic alliances with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United States, expansionist activities in Libya and Sudan, and the establishment of military bases in the Horn of Africa [53]. Additionally, the UAE leverages soft power through humanitarian aid, investments, and its temporary UN Security Council membership (2022–2023) to advance its strategic interests.

The Arab Spring of 2011 marked a turning point for the UAE, shifting its hedging strategy toward traditional balancing. This involved strengthening military capabilities and alliances, particularly with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, as part of its recalibrated approach toward Iran. The UAE's evolving foreign policy reflects its efforts to secure its interests while navigating the region's geopolitical complexities.

Qatar has pursued an independent foreign policy, distancing itself from Saudi Arabia's influence and adopting a comprehensive hedging strategy. This approach includes alliances with Turkey, Iran, and the United States, substantial military acquisitions, and support for political Islam movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Qatar has also hosted opposition figures from other GCC states and financed media platforms critical of its neighbors, actions perceived as provocative by Saudi Arabia and the UAE [60].

Qatar's strategic alliances have played a critical role in safeguarding its sovereignty. The country hosts the Al Udeid Air Base, the United States Central Command headquarters, and the Joint Air Operations Center, investing \$400 million in its expansion in 2003 to solidify ties with the U.S. and ensure protection from regional threats. During the 2017 GCC crisis and blockade, Qatar forged a military alliance with Turkey, which proved instrumental in countering the blockade and deterring potential military action from neighboring states. Qatar also strengthened its ties with Iran through economic partnerships, including shared gas field operations and proposed regional security initiatives, reflecting its pragmatic approach to regional dynamics [61].

Kuwait's foreign policy reflects a nuanced balancing act shaped by the disproportionate power dynamics within the GCC. The presence of regional giants like Iran and Saudi Arabia, alongside smaller Gulf states, has driven Kuwait to adopt a neutral and mediating role. Recognizing the risks of power asymmetry and regional instability, Kuwait emphasizes diplomacy and conflict resolution as key pillars of its foreign policy. This pragmatic approach is underpinned by a liberal economic framework that aligns foreign policy decisions with economic gains [62].

Kuwait has actively mediated GCC disputes, including the UAE-Oman crisis (2009) and the Qatar-GCC conflicts in 2014 and 2017, culminating in the Al-Ula Agreement of 2021. Regionally, Kuwait has sought alliances to balance power with dominant neighbors, such as signing a defense agreement with Turkey in 2018 and fostering relations with Iraq by contributing \$122 million toward its reconstruction [63]. Internationally, Kuwait has consistently participated in U.S.-led

security alliances and expressed support for the creation of an "Arab NATO" to counter Iranian influence while maintaining stable relations with Tehran [64].

Bahrain's foreign policy primarily revolves around "bandwagoning" strategies, aligning with stronger powers to ensure its security. This approach has led Bahrain to closely integrate its internal security with GCC frameworks and accept Saudi dominance in regional affairs. Bahrain has supported Saudi-led initiatives, including the Yemen war (2015) and the blockade of Qatar (2017). However, its reliance on Saudi Arabia and the United States has rendered it vulnerable to external pressures. For instance, Bahrain severed diplomatic ties with Iran in solidarity with Saudi Arabia following the 2016 attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, despite domestic opposition from its Shia population [65].

The United States' policy of countering Iranian influence has exacerbated tensions in the Gulf. Incidents such as attacks on Emirati and Saudi oil tankers and facilities, including the 2019 Aramco attacks, underscored regional instability. While U.S. responses, including the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, escalated tensions, Gulf states like the UAE and Bahrain pursued normalization agreements with Israel as a counterbalance to Iran. These accords, part of the "Abraham Accords," highlight shifting regional dynamics and the Gulf states' strategic recalibration in response to American policies and Iranian activities [66].

Following the U.S. policy shift under President Trump (2017–2021) and the promotion of the "Deal of the Century," which sought to separate Arab-Israeli normalization from Palestinian statehood, several Gulf states—UAE, Bahrain, and Oman—engaged in overt relations with Israel [50]. While Qatar maintained its role as a mediator in Gaza with U.S. approval, Kuwait firmly opposed normalization, reflecting its principled stance on Palestinian self-determination [67].

In conclusion, the foreign policies of GCC states exhibit a spectrum of strategic approaches, ranging from Oman's pragmatic neutrality to the UAE's assertive interventionism, Qatar's comprehensive hedging, Kuwait's diplomatic balancing, and Bahrain's bandwagoning. These diverse strategies reflect the complex geopolitical realities of the Gulf, shaped by regional rivalries, global power dynamics, and the need to safeguard national sovereignty in an ever-volatile environment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the study has illuminated the multifaceted and complex security challenges faced by the small Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, driven by their limited geographic size, small populations, and lack of strategic depth. These inherent vulnerabilities make these states susceptible to sustained pressures from dominant regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, which often seek to extend their influence at the expense of the sovereignty and foreign policy independence of these smaller nations. This competitive and volatile environment necessitates innovative and multilayered strategies to ensure the survival, stability, and sovereignty of these states.

The findings underscore that external interventions in the internal affairs of these states have intensified their security concerns, compelling them to form strategic international alliances, particularly with the United States and other Western powers. Comprehensive defense agreements have not only internationalized the region's security dynamics but have also tethered the security of these smaller states to broader global political agendas. This dependency highlights the dual-edged nature of international alliances, offering protection while limiting autonomous decision-making.

Geography and demography also present central dilemmas influencing the security strategies of the GCC states. Each state has tailored its approach based on its unique geopolitical circumstances. For instance, Bahrain, constrained by its minimal territorial and demographic resources, has aligned closely with major powers, particularly Saudi Arabia, to mitigate its vulnerabilities. In contrast, Qatar and Kuwait have adopted intermediary roles, leveraging their positions as mediators in regional disputes to foster stability and avoid direct confrontations. Oman has maintained a policy of neutrality and strategic non-involvement in regional conflicts, enabling it to preserve balanced relationships with diverse actors. On the other hand, the UAE has pursued an assertive and dynamic strategy, engaging actively in regional crises to expand its influence and safeguard its economic and security interests.

Three primary conclusions emerge from this study:

**Geographic Constraints and Adaptive Strategies:** The small size of these states imposes both internal and external security challenges, necessitating pragmatic policies that emphasize international alliances while strengthening domestic governance structures. These strategies have provided a measure of protection in an unpredictable regional environment.

**Internal Resilience through Strategic Alliances:** To counter regional ambitions, the smaller GCC states have adopted "survival" strategies that involve reinforcing their internal stability through controlled openness and robust governance frameworks. Their reliance on alliances with the United States and other global powers has been pivotal in offsetting regional power asymmetries.

**Flexible Bandwagoning Approaches:** These states have strategically engaged with major regional powers in ways that safeguard their interests without provoking direct confrontations. This flexibility has allowed them to maintain a delicate balance, ensuring both their sovereignty and their ability to navigate complex geopolitical challenges.

In conclusion, the study affirms that the small GCC states have successfully devised diverse security strategies that blend international alliances, selective neutrality, and limited regional engagement. This adaptive approach has enabled them to achieve a strategic equilibrium, preserving their national security while maintaining a degree of independence and resilience within an ever-volatile regional context.

## References

- [1] M. Abd-Rabbo, G. Zalloum, and Z. Nemrawi, "Decolonizing imperialist discourse in Jane austen's persuasion," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 229-243, 2023. <http://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.45.3.0229>
- [2] H. M. A. Mohammad, "Critical discourse analysis of biden's speech on the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *World Journal of English Language*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 1-54, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n3p54>
- [3] M. S. Al-Futaisi, "The logic of dominance among small states: A contemporary political perspective. (In Arabic)," *Journal of Political Science and Law*, no. 7, 2018.
- [4] S. Salahuddin, "The external impact on small states according to network analysis: The case of Jordan," *Arab Policies Journal*, no. 37, 2019.
- [5] R. L. Rothstein, *Alliances and small powers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- [6] Naji and Najm, "An introduction to understand the roles of small states," *Tikrit Journal For Political Science*, vol. 1, no. 27, pp. 71-94, 2022.
- [7] S. Jaraya, "Transformations in the concept of security under new international threats," *Journal of Legal and Political Sciences*, no. 8, 2014.
- [8] W. Bosity, "The concept of security in international relations perspectives," *Journal of the Egyptian Institute for Studies*, 2019.
- [9] N. H. Misbah, M. Mohamad, M. M. Yunus, and A. Ya'acob, "Identifying the factors contributing to students' difficulties in the English language learning," *Creative Education*, vol. 8, no. 13, pp. 1999-2008, 2017.
- [10] G. Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," *World Politics*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 144-172, 1998.
- [11] A. Jandali, *The impact of the cold war on major trends and the international system*. Cairo: Madbouli Library, 2011.
- [12] W. Aqeel, "The epistemological transformations of realism and liberalism in international relations theory. (In Arabic)," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2015.
- [13] J. S. Nye, *The future of power (Kindle edition)*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.
- [14] S. Smith, *New approaches to international theory*. In J. Baylis & S. Smith (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics*. Dubai: Gulf Center for Translation and Publishing, 2004.
- [15] J. Baylis, *International security in the post-Cold War era*. In J. Baylis & S. Smith (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics*. Dubai: Gulf Center for Translation and Publishing, 2004.
- [16] S. Kuznets, "Economic growth of small nations. In E. A. G. Robinson (Ed.), *Economic consequences of the size of nations*." New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960, pp. 14-32.
- [17] K. Al-Masri, "Constructivist theory in international relations. (In Arabic)," *Damascus University Journal for Economic and Legal Sciences*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2014.
- [18] Q. Wahiba, "Constructivist theory in security studies," Unpublished Master's Thesis Mohamed Boudiaf University., 2016.
- [19] A. Nouri, A. Etminan, J. A. Teixeira da Silva, and R. Mohammadi, "Assessment of yield, yield-related traits and drought tolerance of durum wheat genotypes (*Triticum turjidum* var. durum Desf.)," *Australian Journal of Crop Science*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 8-16, 2011.
- [20] M. A. East, "Size and foreign policy behavior: A test of two models," *World Politics*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 556-576, 1973.
- [21] D. Vital, *The inequality of small states: Political problems of small states in a modern world*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- [22] S. M. Walt, "Who's afraid of a balance of power? The United States is ignoring the most basic principle of international relations, to its own detriment foreign policy," Retrieved: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/08/whos-afraid-of-a-balance-of-power/>. 2017.
- [23] K. N. Waltz, *Theory of international politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.
- [24] N. Turki, "International alliances: A multi-strategy approach to regional threats European center for counterterrorism and intelligence studies," Retrieved: <https://www.europarabct.com>. 2021.
- [25] H. Bakherat, "Strategies of small states in confronting major powers," *Egyptian Institute for Studies. (In Arabic)*, 2018.
- [26] H. Z. Al Ameri, "International relations between balance of power and balance of threat (theoretical framework)," *Political Sciences Journal*, no. 53, 2017.
- [27] M. Al-Azzawi, "The gulf between regional threats and strategic challenges. (In Arabic)," *Opinions on the Gulf Journal, Gulf Research Center*, no. 64, 2010.
- [28] K. Atwan, "Global powers and regional balances (In Arabic)," Osama Publishing and Distribution House, Amman, Jordan, 2010.
- [29] S. Van Evera, "Why Europe matters, why the third world doesn't: American grand strategy after the cold war," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 1-51, 1990.
- [30] K. Jefferson, "Hegemonic influence and the creation of regional architecture in Latin America," Annual APSA Meeting Paper, 2020.
- [31] R. L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for profit: Bringing the revisionist state back in," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 72-107, 1994.
- [32] L. Sherwood, "Small states' strategic hedging for security and influence trends research & advisory," Retrieved: <http://trendsinstitution.org/small-states-strategic-hedging-for-security-and-influence/>. 2016.
- [33] J. S. Heier et al., "Pegcetacoplan for the treatment of geographic atrophy secondary to age-related macular degeneration (OAKS and DERBY): two multicentre, randomised, double-masked, sham-controlled, phase 3 trials," *The Lancet*, vol. 402, no. 10411, pp. 1434-1448, 2023.
- [34] F. Elias, "Global strategic balances in the 21st century. Middle East affairs journal, (153)." Beirut: Center for Strategic Studies, 2016.
- [35] C. Coker, *War in an age of risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- [36] A. Wutfa, "Expatriate labor and the challenges of cultural identity in the Arab gulf states," *Arab Future*, vol. 30, no. 344, 2007.
- [37] G. Al-Shehabi, "Bahrain: A tightrope between the two shores of the Gulf. Al Jazeera studies. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/node/4009>. 2016.
- [38] S. Al-Abed, "Qatar's foreign policy and the Arab Spring: From mediation to intervention," *Algerian Journal of Security and Development*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2016.
- [39] M. H. Al Gharaybeh and M. T. Bani Salameh, "An analytical study of iran's ambitions in the Arabian gulf region (1979-2022)," (In Arabic). *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 360-371, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v51i2.4136>

- [40] F. Abu Saleeb, "Kuwaiti mediation: Historical expertise in facing a unique crisis. Al Jazeera studies. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/node/4192>. 2017.
- [41] G. Salameh, *Society and the state in the Arab Mashreq. (In Arabic)*. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1999.
- [42] F. Elias, "Shiite geopolitics and Iranian geostrategic imagination: Areas of influence and power-building Al Jazeera studies," Retrieved: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/node/4505>. 2019.
- [43] M. T. B. Salameh and M. K. al-Sharah, "Kuwait's democratic experiment: Roots, reality, characteristics, challenges, and the prospects for the future," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 57-81, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2011.12023185>
- [44] N. Nasri and J. Abdullah, "Qatar's foreign policy: Continuity or reorientation? (In Arabic). Al Jazeera center for studies," Retrieved: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2014/06/201462411230518576.html>. 2014.
- [45] A. Ali, "The gulf states and the belt and road forum. (in arabic). China today," Retrieved: [http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctarabic/2018/wmdslzdf/201910/t20191030\\_800183208.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctarabic/2018/wmdslzdf/201910/t20191030_800183208.htm). 2019.
- [46] Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Kuwait vision 2035: New Kuwait," Retrieved: <https://www.mofa.gov.kw/en/pages/kuwait-vision-2035> n.d.
- [47] M. Eid, "Kuwaiti national security (2021-2030): Specificity, characteristics, and strategic vision," Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies, Strategic Report No.12, 2021.
- [48] S. Colombo, "Unpacking the GCC's response to the Arab Spring. Istituto Affari Internazionali," Retrieved: [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/Sharaka\\_C\\_01.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/Sharaka_C_01.pdf). 2012.
- [49] Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, "The blockade in Qatar: Prospects for continuation or resolution," Retrieved: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/Qatar-Blockade-Prospects-for-Continuation-or-Resolution.aspx>. 2020.
- [50] M. T. Bani Salameh, "Bahrain's vision in the new gulf order," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 110-121, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12675>
- [51] S. Vakil, *Iran and the GCC: Hedging, Pragmatism and opportunism*. Chatham House, 2018.
- [52] S. Jalal, "A review of the joint defense agreement between Turkey and Kuwait. (In Arabic). Noon Post," Retrieved: <https://www.noonpost.com/content/25165>. 2018.
- [53] H. Abish, "The United Arab Emirates: Evolving national security strategy. Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://agsiw.org/ar/uaes-evolving-national-security-strategy-ar/>. 2017.
- [54] N. AlQershi, "Strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic innovation and the performance of SMEs: The mediating role of human capital," *Management Science Letters*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 1003-1012, 2021.
- [55] Al Jazeera, "Oman's Sultan visits Saudi Arabia on first overseas trip. Al Jazeera," Retrieved: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/11/omans-sultan-visits-saudi-arabia-on-first-overseas-trip>. 2021.
- [56] H. Altiok, "Kuwait's mediation in the gulf crisis: Dynamics of kuwait's foreign policy approaches. in: Rahman, m.m., al-azm, a. (eds) social change in the gulf region gulf studies," vol. 8. Singapore: Springer, 2023.
- [57] A. El-Dessouki, "Strategic hedging in the Middle East," *International Politics Journal*, vol. 215, p. 31, 2019.
- [58] A. El-Dessouki and O. R. Mansour, "Small states and strategic hedging: the United Arab Emirates' policy towards Iran," *Review of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 8, no. 5, pp. 394-407, 2023.
- [59] Middle East Eye, "The UAE may have withdrawn from Yemen, but its influence remains strong," Retrieved: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/uae-may-have-withdrawn-yemen-its-influence-remains-strong>. 2020.
- [60] D. P. Roche, "Military security in small states: Qatar as a model. Al Jazeera studies," Retrieved: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2018/05/180520125354839.html>. 2018.
- [61] Al Jazeera Center for Studies, "Realistic policies: Qatar's regional relations as effective balances against the blockade. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://www.aljazeera.net/midan/reality/politics/2018/6/3>. 2018.
- [62] S. B. Al-Saeedi, "Kuwaiti foreign policy: From political survival to renewal. (In Arabic)," *Journal of Financial and Commercial Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2021.
- [63] Al-Qabas Newspaper, "\$330 million in pledges to rebuild Iraq: \$122 million from Kuwait. Al-Qabas Newspaper. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://alqabas.com/article/500496>. 2018.
- [64] A. Al-Sharif, "The Iranian factor in shaping Middle Eastern alliances Arab forum for Iranian policy analysis. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://afaip.com>. 2019.
- [65] W. Roebuck, "Bahrain and Iran aim to restore ties Arab gulf states institute in Washington," Retrieved: <https://agsiw.org/bahrain-and-iran-aim-to-restore-ties/>. 2023.
- [66] Arabi21, "The assassination of Soleimani opens all scenarios: Anticipation is dominant. Arabi21. (In Arabic)," Retrieved: <https://arabi21.com/story>. 2020.
- [67] M. T. Bani Salameh, "Kuwait's hedging strategy towards Iran and Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2024.