



## Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council Membership : Problems and Prospects

Hamood Mohammed Algaoud  
Department of Political Science  
School of Humanities  
Lovely Professional University (INDIA)  
Email: hamoudalgaoud1992@gmail.com

Dr. Rajeesh C S  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science  
School of Humanities  
Lovely Professional University (INDIA)  
Email: rajeesh.24365@lpu.co.in

### Abstract

*The Yemen relationships with Gulf Cooperation Council have deep roots geographically, culturally, historically as well as religiously. Yemen is the only country in the Arabia Peninsula which that has no membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council , due to some diplomatic, economic, and political differences. The Yemeni membership in the GCC affected deeply by some diplomatic attitudes which made the relationships between the two side more complicated as well as the political changes in the region. The instability of Yemen is one of the main reasons that has its great impact of giving Yemen full GCC membership. The war which has been going since 2014 is considered to be actually threat to the stability of the Gulf sub regional as whole. This article gives an argument that Yemen must be given actual and realistic route as well as roadmap to eventual accession to the GCC which will beneficial both side GCC countries and Yemen. Also it studies the dimensions of the inclusion Yemen in the GCC during different period of time and analyses the impact of ignorance in the current Yemeni crisis.*

**Key words:** *Yemeni membership, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Gulf cooperation Council, Iraq, and Kuwait.*

## **Introduction**

The Gulf Cooperation Council which is known in Arabic language as "maglis Attawn Al khaliqi" that is considered to be a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of the Arab States of the Persian Gulf Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates. All these States are considered to be monarchies: two are absolute monarchies (Saudi Arabia and Oman), one is federal monarchy and three are constitutional monarchies (Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrian). On 11 November 1981 in Abu Dhabi the unified economic agreement between the GCC's countries was signed. Yemen is the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula bordered by two GCC's members Saudi Arabia as well as Oman. In spite of geostrategic significant of Yemen for the Gulf region and the historical, cultural and mutual ties the Gulf States but it is not considered as member of the Gulf Cooperation Council. "Geopolitics as well as demography , Yemen has very strategic significance to the stability of the Gulf States. However, the GCC countries haven't appeared to development of the economy in Yemen, not have tried to give Yemen membership of the Gulf Cooperation Council." (Abdulsalam Mohammed)

During the formation and establishment process of the Gulf Cooperation Council Yemen was two separate countries, one was in the north part country, Yemen Arab Republic and the second one was in the southern part of the country, was Known as People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The instability was going on in both parts then they came to the greatest event in the history of Yemen, in May 22, 1990 the Yemeni Unification in which the two countries formed as Republic of Yemen. The relationships during the 1990s between Republic of Yemen and The GCC States were not good and complicated due to border conflicts and disputes between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as complex diplomatic attitudes between the two sides. The diplomatic attitudes of Sana'a during the Iraq' invasion of Kuwait which directly threatened Saudi Arabia. At the time the president of

Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh, who enjoyed very good relations with the president of Iraq Saddam Hussein, so Saleh was directly against the United States military intervention that was requested by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries as well as some. As a result of this misreading of the diplomatic attitude, the GCC members swiftly suspended all budgetary support to Yemen so this action was affected Yemeni economic deeply. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were expelled one million Yemeni expatriates from their territory. Some political analysts view this diplomatic mistake as one of the main reasons of not including Yemen in the GCC. According to *Carnegie Middle East Center*, this was greatly harmed the country's frail economy and contributed to be one reason the Yemeni civil war in summer of 1994, at the time that the southern separatists sought to recreate the former South Yemen which was separate state before unification. All the countries of the GCC would offer financial and political support to the secessionists, just Qatar didn't support them, but actually Saleh soon gained the war (Farea Al-Muslimi). The bilateral relationships were improved between Yemen and the GCC states after the signing of a border treaty between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in 2000 which followed directly formal demarcation. As a result of this positive step between the two sides Yemen was allowed to join GCC bodies for health, sport, education and labor it was as a first step for a prelude to full accession, this was occurred in Muscat but the membership of Yemen was stalled and leaving Yemen stuck at the candidacy stage.

There were some debates about giving membership to Yemen as either a full GCC member ship or as associate member. The Gulf Cooperation Council was established an office in Sana'a, Yemen, but this office was just as set up to assist GCC support to Yemen, not considered as the first step to Yemeni membership (Robert Sharp, 2014). The leaders of the Gulf Countries especially the neighbouring of Saudi Arabia, are acutely aware of the future of instability in Yemen so they were feeding and strengthening of some groups that still calculate its supporting in hundreds rather than thousands of supporters (Finn 2011).

The bilateral relations of the GCC countries with Yemen seem to be has significant value for all especially by the virtual importance of Saudi Arabia. As in other spaces of foreign policy, most Gulf Cooperation Council countries (but Qatar is

not included ) are at troubles not to oppose or being against Saudi Arabia in meetings with the third parties (Edward Burke 2014). During the Uprising of Arabic Spring, the GCC played vital role in Yemeni crisis especially at the late of 2010 and the starting of 2011, there were many Revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria and has been known as “Arab Spring” which hassled to many changes in Arab regimes. Yemen was one of them in which there were some protests against the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh; the crisis in Yemen has inflamed when Saleh used violence against demonstrators. After that time ,the Gulf Countries had done a diplomatic intervention to solve the political problem by providing a special initiative to remove Saleh; and transfer the authority to his Vice president Hadi by presidential election of one candidate . All these events in turn constituted a threat to the security of the Arabian Gulf at the national and regional levels(Saleh Al-Qtaibi 2019). So the Gulf Cooperation Council succeeded to resolve the crisis in Yemen through Gulf diplomacy by using of pressure upon Saleh to transfer his power by signing an treaty on 23 November 2011 in light of Gulf initiative under the sponsorships of the GCC, with the support of the Security Council.

After the Houthi troops who are supported by Iran politically and militarily succeed to control the capital of Yemen Sana'a on 21September 2014, then the Yemeni civil war started between the Houthi's military and the Legitimacy military leading the Hadi who is the president of Yemen who was elected to replace the former president Ali Saleh as it mentioned in the GCC' initiative to solve the political conflict of Uprising of Arabic Spring. In the late January 2015 civil war was more inflamed between government forces and the Houthi tribesmen capturing the capital Sana'a so the arrested the president Hadi but the UN Security Council in 15 February of the same year, issued resolution critically blaming the Houthi's actions and calling on them to come again to transition process that has its roots in the National Dialogue Conference.

Hadi succeed to escaped from Sana'a and reemerged in Aden, the outside the Houthis' control so he called the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arabic countries for intervention so the Coalition of countries leading by Saudi Arabia launched air strikes in 26 March 2015(Robert Burrowes2021). The GCC countries

with the leadership of Saudi Arabia, made military coalition and launched intervention against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels called Operation Decisive Storm, this brought Yemen-GCC relations back in concerns. While the both sides enjoy little to no influence over Gulf Arab nations, some Yemeni politicians have attempted to make use the chance to again raise the membership issue (Farea Al-Muslimi 2016). If the GCC states want to help the people of Yemen and restoring their government they have to offer a credible and truthful road map to create a great hope for peace which will serve the both sides Yemen as well as Gulf region as whole.

## Discussion

### Era Before Yemeni Unification

Before 22 May 1990, the country of Yemen was two separated states, the first one was in the northern part of the country Yemen Arab Republic which was established on September 26, 1962. The second one was in the Southern part of the country People's Democratic Republic of Yemen which was established after the independence from Britain Role on November 30, 1967. This was the period of unrest and instability and disputes in the two parts. During the early 1980s the GCC was established and the relationships between Yemen and the GCC states were somehow good but not too much good due to the different political regimes as well as different diplomatic attitudes especially with Saudi Arabia in which there were some conflicts and disputes between the southern part which known as Yemen Arab Republic in the term of borders between the two countries. In the case of the Southern part of Yemen which was known as People's Democratic Republic of Yemen that was considered as the only Marxist country in Arabic Peninsula and also was in alliance with the Soviet Union so this made the relation more complicated between the South of Yemen and the GCC states especially Saudi Arabia. Relationships between Kuwait and the both parts of Yemen South and north were very good in which Kuwait was considered to have large pledges of development assistance to Yemen. The importance to be mentioned here is that during that time Kuwait was deeply supported any government of Yemen to give

way to join the GCC( Al-Mulla 2010). For the United Arab Emirates the bilateral relationships between the two countries were too much close during the 1980s in which the UAE supported the stability in Yemen politically and great supporting the economy of Yemen especially in education sector as well as electricity projects also some government services. For Oman and the south Yemen which shared borders from the east of Yemen so during the 1970s there were some disputes and conflicts between the South of Yemen and Oman especially in the Province of Dhofar in which the government of South of Yemen was supported the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman so the Diplomatic relation was too much complicated but in 1983 the relationships became good after the establishment of diplomatic relationships between South of Yemen and Oman so in 1987 Oman opened an embassy in the Capital of south of Yemen Aden(Edward Burke 2012).

The GCC state which is considered to be the most proactive in seeking to resolve Yemeni internal problems in the both parts Southern as well as northern in term of politics as well as economic development. Also Bahrain is considered to be different from other GCC states in which it has indicated that it is so willingly to undertake assistance in technical projects especially through the Social Development Fund as well as providing Yemen some assistance in financial sector. In this period the relationships between the two parts of Yemen with the GCC were good despite of the military clashes as well as political instability in Yemen and the lack of development. Losing of the GCC membership for North of Yemen it had great impact in the country in which North of Yemen and the GCC states had common interests in which they were all against the South of Yemen which was considered as Marxist state and its tendency against the GCC states politics. As a respond for the not inclusion North of Yemen and Iraq so they tried to creating new Arab Cooperation Council that included Iraq, North of Yemen, Jordan, and Egypt. These four countries were established The Arab Cooperation Council in Baghdad 1989 but unfortunately this Council was born dead especially after Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait.

## Yemen Unification and the Gulf War

On May 22, 1990 which is considered as a great historical event in Yemen politics in which the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (the South Yemen) and the Yemen Arab Republic (North of Yemen) joined to become the Republic of Yemen. During this period which considered to have great international changes in politics especially the starting of separating of the Soviet Union. While the relation between Yemen and became somehow good then great event happened suddenly on 4 August 1990 the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, that action which had a great impact in Yemen \_GCC states relationships. At that time Yemen was the only Arab country had chairman of UN Security Council in which Yemen voted against the use of force so it was looking to this attitude from GCC states as betrayal of Kuwait so it created serious economic and political crisis. This was because the strong relationship between the Yemeni president at the time Ali Saleh and Saddam Hussein. But this attitude strongly affected Yemen in which more than 800,000 Yemen migrants were expelled from Saudi Arabia and thousands more from Kuwait (Dresch 2000). This affect Yemeni-GCC states relationships till now. In the year 1996, Yemen has expressed a very great desire to have full GCC membership. The respond at that time was to solve the issue of border between Saudi Arabia and Oman and Yemen. During that time the country was in political stability and the process of democracy going on in which the first presidential election was conducted in 1998.

### New Dynamic Political and Diplomatic Development in the Relationships

The bilateral relations between Yemen and Saudi Arabia were improved and developed in the term of diplomacy as well as politically so it ultimately led to signing a border treaty in 2000, that has a great impact on the relationships between Yemen as well as whole GCC states. This vital step was following formal procedures of demarcation and neutralizing between the two sides. Due to this positive treaty, immediately afterward during the summit of GCC which was conducting in Muscat (Oman's capital) so Yemen was allowed to join the four GCC bodies for labor, health, education, and sports. The Yemeni membership was leaving at the candidacy stage (Farea Al-Muslimi 2016).

After this time the relations between the Yemen and GCC states became very good and improved not only with Saudi Arabia but with all GCC states in terms of aid, investments, and economic but there is no clear respond for the full membership in GCC. As a first time in the history of Gulf Cup champions, the Yemeni national team had to participate in the Gulf Cup 16 which was held in Kuwait 2003. All Yemeni people and government were too much optimistic to be with their Arabic brothers whom sharing with them great and deep religious, cultural as well as lingual relationships in which they all have the same blood relation. The first visit of the General Secretariat of the GCC to Yemen was in 2005 when he visited Sana'a in which he proposed the provocative prospects of a GCC-Yemen free trade and investment area. In the same year 2005 the Gulf Cooperation Council summit was conducted in a Abu Dhabi in which the Yemeni hopes were raised too much, so at that time the decision was taken regarding to the plan of and the process of integrating Yemen into GCC as full membership by the year 2015. At that time it was announced by the Secretariat of the GCC that there must be some successive stages of the process of integrating Yemen in GCC so it was lasted three stages. The first one is the Consultative Group meeting, the second one was the association of Yemeni Legislation and regulations with those of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the third one was the stable extension of Yemen's membership of the respective Gulf Cooperation Council bodies. Actually, 10 US\$ billion were considered as Yemen's accessions costs(Ghoneim 2006). The second joint meeting between Yemen and the GCC Secretariat in 2006 which was conducting for the committee of technology which included the GCC ministries of Finance as well as MOPIC was formed. At that time this first committee of technology included Yemen's deputy minister for planning and representatives from the GCC member-state Ministries of Finance(Edward Burke 2005). From 2006 to 2010 the relationships between the GCC states and Yemen were going so quickly at this period of time in different aspects of economy, development, health, education as well as mutual trade. The IMF' economists predict that a considerable improve in productivity for both the GCC states from one side and Yemen from other as result of a reduction of tariff and some other borders restrictions upon Yemen's entrance (Chami 2004).



During that time Yemeni government ministers and technocrats have been doing very hard work to demonstrate commitment to take the real required measures to join the GCC, so in the year 2007 Yemen tried as much as possible to hold serial workshops in the capital Sana'a to go through the steps that are necessary for Yemen to undertake qualification for accession to the GCC. Also, the Yemeni MOPIC doing hard works to get use from this opportunity so a glimmer of hope was emerged in 2009 in the meeting of GCC's foreign ministers and Yemen especially when they decided to develop a mechanism to promote private sector investment in as well as the argument perspective Commercial Chamber of GCC seeking of promoting business partnerships between Yemen and GCC. Indeed, process of large influx of the Yemeni migrants are considered to be the main concern of restricting of joining the GCC. By allowing large number of Yemeni labour and allowing them to entry in into the Gulf economic zone without visa restrictions will deeply affect the citizens of other member states. Since 2010 Saudi Arabia and Qatar have increased the opportunity of education that is by providing scholarships to Yemeni students. Moreover, GCC Free Trade Agreement which is considered to be as a halfway stage towards full membership that is why some Yemeni official were disappointed in their request for implementation of this agreement. There was very great speech of the king of Saudi Arabia Abdullah that he was called for skilled Yemeni labour and support them with preferential treatment in the GCC to help them to make use of such opportunity. In the term of sport, the government and the people of Yemen were very happy and full optimistic to host the Gulf Cup 2010, which considered to be the first time Gulf Cup for championship which brought together all in Aden for seeking of improving the brotherhood feeling between all Gulf states.

### **New political Formulations**

The uprising of Arab Spring which was started in the late Of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 in man Arab states, it is a new concept of politics in the Middle East region. Many revolutions started occurred in this period, the first one start from Tunisia then separating to many other countries such as Egypt, Syria, Libya as well as Yemen. This waves of revolutions have created new dimensions and new dynamic change in politics in this region. According to the Neoliberalism

these Arab Revolutions had an effect on the national security in the GCC States due to separating of the protests in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait as well as Oman but the most affected country in GCC was Bahrain(Saleh Al-Qtaibi 2019). Yemen is considered as one country which was affected of these of revolution so there were many protests against the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh who was in power for 33years as president of Yemen. This war was considered as a headache and nightmare for the GCC states due to Geopolitical strategic significant of Yemen for the national security of the region. So it was a time for the GCC Countries to play vital role in Yemeni crisis and to understand the geopolitics gap in this crisis in which it threatens threat the regional security especially there were some regional actors in this crisis such as Iran. The Yemeni Peaceful Youth Revolution was occurred because the high unemployment, corruption as well as economic condition. In that time Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh had mentioned that Yemen must be considered as the "security background of the GCC." It was the time for GCC Countries to control the crisis. So after too much diplomatic affairs to produce as suitable solution for this conflict and bring the internal Yemeni political parties together the GCC have given initiative for a peaceful transition that is known as Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative. This initiative actual had two phase, the first one is to transfer the power from the president Saleh to his vice president Hadi by providing presidential election which was hold on February 21, 2012. The second phase was about transformation process that included reforming of political and electoral laws, changing in the Yemeni constitution and making referendum in the new constitution, and making some changing in the parliamentary and local council election as well as the presidential elections. Also, the initiative included making the National Dialogue Conferences(NDC) it was seeking for bringing all the domestic actors of the conflict. Indeed, this initiative is successfully led to transform the power from the former president Ali Saleh to the president Hadi. After that the new president Hadi who was seriously made a government divided equally between the JMP which is led by Islah Party and the General People Congress party but this government was too much weak that is the main reasons for the transition failure in the country. The process of military reconstruction which made the military so much weak. The all domestic Yemeni actors in that crisis made Yemeni politician to express their real ambition for

Yemen to get the full GCC membership. Despite the finishing of NDC and its succeed in bringing the large spectrum of Yemeni society but it fail to resolve some major internal issues and the increasing of religious movement conflict( Kim Salmutter 2017). The NDC was considered as the bright hope of all Yemeni in which it was a crossroads for the investment and development with the help and guide of the CGG umbrella. When GCC established an office in Sana'a, Yemen in October 2012,that was set up to help in assistance of GCC support to Yemen so it was considered to rebirth the hope of Yemeni membership in GCC. Actually this office was welcomed in Yemen with the hope for the promised and the strategic resolution which was passed in UAE 2005 during the GCC Summit in December for Yemen to join the GCC by 2015.

In early 2014 the Yemen National Dialogue Conference was concluded and the conditions were set for the writing of new constitution, and the national referendum for the presidential and parliamentary elections. In the phase of politics the president Hadi with his government had succeeded but in reality there was war going on between religious groups due to the weakness of the transitional government, especially in Sa'ada province. The was real war going on between the Houthi which is considered as Shi'a Islamic religious group and Salafi that is Sunni religious group in Katab district in that time the Houthi won the war and succeeded to control the full province then came to Amaran province in which there was directly ignorance from the government for the Houthi separating and controlling one city to another without any reaction from the government as well as the president Hadi.

### **GCC Military Intervention**

On 18 August 2014, the Houthi movement started series of demonstrations in Sana'a against increasing of the fuel prices. On 21 September in the same year the Houthi took control over the Yemeni capital Sana'a in very dramatic events so after many days the Prime Minister Basindawa gave his resignation in that time the Yemeni civil war started in very smoky political atmosphere. It was the real starting of Yemeni civil war between the Houthi militaries and the legitimacy which is represented by the president Hadi who is recognized by the UN as the

legitimate president of Yemen. When the Houthi succeeded to take over Sana'a and capturing the presidential palace by the forces of Houthi, so the president Abdu Rabbu and his Cabinet had given their resignation especially after they had given under an effective house arrest. In March 2015 the president Hadi succeeded to escape from Sana'a to Aden. On 26<sup>th</sup> March the Saudi Arabia led a direct military intervention based on the request of the legitimate president of Yemen Hadi. The military operation called "Decisive Storm" it was operated for helping the Yemeni loyal troops to the Yemeni government that has recognized internationally. This coalition included all GCC states as well as some other Arab States except Oman and supported by the UN which conducted Resolution 2216(2015). For Saudi Arabia this Revolution of Houthi who are supported by Iran is considered as real threat to its Security as well as the whole Gulf region (Wojciech Grabowski 2016). In this time the GCC countries realized the geopolitical significance of Yemen for the Gulf region in politics, economics, as well as regional security. On 29 October, 2015 the Yemeni Minister of Planning Mohammed Maytami in his interview with the Arabiya Channel for news said that Yemen will request to join the Gulf Cooperation Council after security and stability is restored in the country. The minister added that the Yemeni president Abdrabbu Mansur Hadi will propose an direct officially request to join the GCC after political stability is succeeded and development and building plans are started. " Yemen is today struggle aggressive political battle. Also he said when government restored to Sana'a so they will start the next step to get the full GCC membership. He also mentioned that Yemen at the present time is cooperating with its Gulf partners secretariat, adding that all the Gulf countries have no problem inclusion Yemen in the GCC.

He said that the security and political challenges Yemen threatened affected the internal Yemeni situation as well as threatened regional and Gulf security.

" We will present a plan in Saudi Arabia next month that will prepare Yemen to be included in the GCC," the spokesman of Yemeni government Rajeh Badi told to Reuters by telephone from Qatar 2015. It were too much optimistic for giving Yemen full GCC membership which will benefit the both sides in different aspects. Despite of military integration and supporting from the GCC countries and their realization of significance of stability for the region but there is no clear respond of

the full Yemeni membership in Gulf even if it was mentioned in 2005 GCC Summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE that Yemen will get full membership in 2015.

## **Conclusion**

The Yemeni membership is an area of problematic issue during the past, present as well as future even if the geostrategic important of the country which is considered to has significant security dimension in the Gulf region. Yemen is one of the Arabian Peninsulas, that is the only country in the region not including in the GCC despite its significance which is considered as the Southern gate of the Peninsula and has its strategically located that provides a link to the Suez Canal. The process of supporting the development of Aden port which is located in the Southern part of the country that has its geostrategic historical linkage in which it will decrease the GCC Countries dependence on the Strait of Hormuz to transfer and exporting oil and this step will decrease tensions with Iran. In wide corner view the full GCC membership to Yemen will help the GCC to utilizing the aspirant " Bridge of Horns" this connecting Djibouti with Yemen over the Bab-el Mandeb which will enable the GCC opening a southern route of GCC influence into Yemen as well as the further penetration into the growing markets of East Africa. Indeed, GCC membership of Yemen is both for security purpose as the benefit of economic market of GCC. Actually, a lot of Yemeni political thinkers who believe that closer integration with the rest of Arabian Peninsula countries will be the best hope of economic as well as political stability by means of including Yemen in the GCC.

## **Recommendations**

The best way for the GCC to insulate itself from the impact of Yemeni failure and equip itself to benefit from the possibility that Yemen will succeed.

Indeed war will never be the only way for the GCC to express their considerations about Yemen and its future so Yemenis deserve more than experiences of Solidarity of GCC.

The stability of Yemen firmly linked to its neighbors, so the surest way to fill the security vacuum is to include Yemen in GCC.

If the GCC countries seriously want to help Yemen people come together to peace by offering them realistic road map of GCC membership for the process of stabilization especially in the era of post conflict.

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