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**RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY POLITICS
IN THE PERSIAN GULF**

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Abstract

Identity politics-ethnic and religious have risen to the forefront in the Persian Gulf post Third Gulf War. This paper traces the historical trajectory of the rise of identity politics in the Persian Gulf by the analysis of key political developments in the Persian Gulf over the last 25 years leading up to and after the Third Gulf War. This will allow an insight into the future of identity politics in the Persian Gulf and its impact upon stability in the region and the wider Middle East.

The Persian Gulf for centuries has been an important avenue for culture and trade due to its geopolitical significance- with it being at the crossroads for access to Africa and Asia. During the course of the last century, the Persian Gulf's importance to the world grew through the discovery of oil and gas in the region. The discovery of oil and gas has been important for the West and the Persian Gulf States. For the West the plethora of oil and gas in the Persian Gulf has provided much needed fuel to support growing and expanding economies and will continue to be ever important into the future as the thirst for energy increases in the West. For the Persian Gulf States the sale of oil and gas has acted as an important source of revenue and has played a central role in developing social and political legitimacy, through the provision of lavish social and welfare services. This has been important in constructing a patron-client relationship between the state and society¹. There is much literature focusing on the impact of a patron-client relationship on state-society relations and whether such a relationship has acted as an obstacle or not to political reform and change in the Persian Gulf¹. It is not the purpose of this paper to step into this extensive literature but to explore the issue of religion, ethnicity and identity politics, which has been swept under the carpet in the Persian Gulf.

There is no doubt that the distribution of revenue resulting from the sale of oil and gas by Persian Gulf States created an artificial sense of legitimacy and loyalty to the state, which failed to really address the crucial issue of identity in complex multi identity societies. The problems arising in the Persian Gulf as a result of the revolutionary tide of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated the problem of identity in the Persian Gulf and the explosive situation which existed in the region. Despite the clear need of identity to be addressed the continuous in flow of economic wealth pushed the issue to the side and provided an escape mechanism for the states in the region. However, a number of inter linked political developments from the late 1970s to this day have put the identity issue on to the table- politicising identity as a result adding to the complexity of the identity problem in the Persian Gulf and really awakening Persian Gulf States to the need of addressing identity. There have been a number of key political developments to hit the Persian Gulf over the last 25 years. In order to understand the issue of identity in the region post Third

¹ - Society has accepted the legitimacy of the state in return for economic benefits and provisions.

Gulf War (i.e. removal of Saddam) it is important to comprehend 4 main political developments which brought the issue of identity firmly to the surface in the region;

- 1) The 1979 Iranian Revolution
- 2) The First Gulf War- Iran-Iraq war- 1980-1988
- 3) The Second Gulf War- Iraqi invasion of Kuwait-1991
- 4) The Third Gulf War- US invasion of Iraq- 2003

This paper will explore how the above political developments have contributed to raising the issue of identity politics in the Persian Gulf, bringing to the surface questions surrounding nationalism and ethnicity. In addition it will explore the impact of the Third Gulf War and the ensuing Iranian nuclear crisis on identity politics in the region. This will allow a conclusion to be made on the future of identity politics and its practical implications for the Persian Gulf.

The Question of Identity Politics

Identity politics is the political activity of various ethnic, religious and cultural groupings in demanding greater economic, social and political rights or self-determination. Identity politics claims to represent and seek to advance the interests of particular groups in society, the members of which often share and unite around common experiences of actual or perceived social and economic injustice, relative to the wider society of which they form part and exist in. In this way, the identity of the oppressed group gives rise to a political basis around which they then unite and begin to assert themselves in society².

Identity politics means more than the sole recognition of ethnic, religious or cultural identity, in fact identity politics seeks to carry these identities forward, beyond mere self-identification, to a political framework based upon that identity. For example, Modern Jewish Zionism was originally secular (and marginal) within the Jewish community, but became driven by its own form of identity politics upon the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. Like wise identity politics played a major role in the creation of the Central Asian states in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet

Union³. This framework is qualitatively different from identity itself, which does not necessarily have to evolve into identity politics.

Beyond the immediate scope of this paper, there is substantial relevance of identity politics to the wider Middle Eastern countries⁴ – For example in Turkey the ethnic question has continuously flared up and acted as a source of internal conflict and tension. The dramatic case in point is that of the armed conflict in Southern Turkey between government forces and the Kurdish separatists under the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK), starting in late 1994 and continuing well into 1995⁵. Some 50,000 of the Turkish army and Air Forces have waged a campaign of search-and-destroy against the PKK in Turkey and a strategy of pursuit in neighbouring Iraqi territory. The Turkish-Kurdish problem has all the hallmarks of the Iraqi-Kurdish, Iranian-Kurdish, and to a lesser extent, the Syrian-Kurdish counterparts⁶. The roots and subsequent dynamics are nearly the same in all the cases mentioned. In addition identity politics was instrumental behind the 1975 Lebanese civil war- with different ethnic and religious groupings demanding greater political rights and recognition in the overall political framework leading to inevitable collapse of the fragile political system in Lebanon⁷. This has arisen once again in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri- which opened up old ethnic and religious wounds between the various religious and ethnic groupings in Lebanese society⁸. Therefore just from the two examples provided identity politics has been and continues to be an issue and problem for Arab states in the Middle East. The Persian Gulf is a region where identity politics has come to dominate regional politics- with it being brought to attention through the political developments listed in the introduction- starting with the 1979 Iranian revolution. This revolution would unleash identity politics across the Persian Gulf and set the foundations for future assertion of identity politics in the region.

1) The 1979 Iranian Revolution

The impact of the Khomeini led Iranian revolution can be seen today with the nuclear stand off between Iran and the West. This revolutionary and confrontational nature of politics characterised the onset of the Iranian revolution leading to tension between the Iranian state and other Persian Gulf states in the region. Immediately there was

concern in the Persian Gulf not only of Khomeini attempting to export the Iranian revolution across the Persian Gulf but also of him encouraging a politicisation of the Shiite communities in the region- this was seen as a major security concern by Persian Gulf States due to the fear of ensuing political fissions and instability⁹. In fact this fear which encompassed the Persian Gulf did materialise, leading to a radicalisation of the nature of Shiite politics in the Persian Gulf through the politicisation of the Shiite communities- a sector of society which had been under represented and marginalised economically, socially and politically in Persian Gulf societies¹⁰. It is important to note that, even before the onset of the Iranian revolution the Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf had undergone the process of politicisation as a direct result of Shiite clerics who had studied in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. These cities during the 1970s were sites of politicisation of Shiite clerics due to the works of Khomeini and Muhammad Baqir al Sadr¹¹, both of which played a crucial role in Shiite revivalism. Key Shiite clerics responsible for the politicisation of Shiite Communities in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East, such as Musa al Sadr, Ayatollah Mohammed Husayn Fadallah, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Sheikh Ali Salman and Sheikh Hassan al Saffar would all pass through the seminaries of Najaf and Karbala taking away with them revolutionary political ideas and thoughts, which they would translate into political work and action. As a result, this would change the course and direction of Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf and right across the Middle East¹². Therefore the Iranian revolution led by the charisma of Khomeini gave more impetus and support to the process of politicisation, which had already started during the mid and late 1970s. However with the belief of an Iranian big brother watching over and supporting you it gave the Shiite movement in the Persian Gulf more vitality and energy, posing a variety of difficulties to the ruling monarchies.

The Shiite communities would emerge from their slumber and unconsciousness after decades of marginalisation and discrimination- allowing the Shiite to assert their religious identity. This created a precarious situation in the Persian Gulf. This assertion of Shiite religious identity would lead to a wave of political violence across the Persian Gulf. In Bahrain the 1970s and 1980s would be characterised by political violence by the Shiite and counter violence by the state in order to maintain a degree of stability in a very unstable period. Tensions were severe between a Shiite majority and Sunni minority¹³. In Saudi Arabia violence erupted in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s in the Eastern provincial towns of Al Hasa and Al Qatif- with

the state responding with brutal force to put down the rebellion¹⁴. In Kuwait violence would characterise the 1980s with attacks on oil pipelines, state infrastructure and even assassination attempts on the life of the Kuwaiti emir himself. The situation in Kuwait was complicated by external Shiite actors settling in Kuwait and engaging in revolutionary action against the state¹⁵. In Iraq the Shiite political movement, Hizb al Dawa would lead the political struggle against the Saddam regime by defying state prohibition of religious processions in 1977 leading to conflict with the state. Thousands of Shiite activists were arrested and executed- including Muhammad Baqir al Sadr and his sister Bint al Huda¹⁶.

The chain of events mentioned raised the issue of Shiite identity firmly onto the table, which was unprecedented. This was a direct result of the politicisation of Shiite clerics and the Iranian revolution which encouraged Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf to challenge and confront what were viewed as oppressive and unjust regimes. Previously the Shiite mentality and outlook had been one of keeping quiet and carrying on with mundane daily life in the midst of marginalisation and persecution but this had changed as a result of revolutionary political ideas and thoughts which had entered the Persian Gulf and the Iranian revolution which connected the injustice, discrimination and persecution to religious discourse as a result raising the sense of belonging to the Shiite community and strengthening Shiite identity¹⁷. Therefore no longer was there a sense of pocketed and isolated Shiite communities in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia but a Shiite identification with regional Shiite communities had occurred, strengthening the bond between the Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf as a result of similar experiences of injustice and oppression¹⁸. Importantly the Persian Gulf States did not know how to deal with the rising tide of Shiite identity, which was of concern to them as it was threatening their internal stability.

2) The First Gulf War- Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988

The reasons behind the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–1988 are not definitive ranging from Saddam’s desire for power and hegemony to Khomeini’s eagerness to spread the Islamic revolution beyond the shores of Iran. Despite this uncertainty why the war began, what is certain is the use of identity by both sides to provide legitimacy. In order to provide justification and to form supportive opinion for the war the issue of

identity politics was raised by Saddam- which would open up a can of worms in the region and affecting the nature of society and politics in the region. Although Iraq is predominantly Arab and Iran is predominantly Persian, the Iran-Iraq border still cuts across some ethnic, religious and political loyalties. In the north, a large population of Kurds (who are neither Arab nor Persian) straddled both sides of the border. Along the southern part of the border, an Arab minority inhabited the Iranian province of Khuzestan among a Persian majority. Furthermore, the largest portion of the Iraqi population is Shiite Muslim, as is the majority of the Iranian population. Shiite religious leaders at odds with the secular (non-religious) government of their own country sometimes sought refuge in the other, straining Iranian-Iraqi relations. Therefore the use of identity politics would become a tactic utilised by both sides in the war. For example, Saddam raised the old issue of sovereignty over the resource-rich Arab province of Khuzestan. The Iraqi regime's dissatisfaction over Iran's possession of oil-rich Khuzestan province was not limited to merely rhetorical and inflammatory statements and speeches; historically Iraq had supported secessionist movements in Khuzestan, and even raised the issue of its territorial claims in the meetings of the Arab League, without any success.

In the build up to the war Iraqi radio stations began exclusively broadcasting into "Arabistan" (Khuzestan), encouraging Arabs living in Iran and even Baluchis to rise and revolt against Iran's central government and to demand their own territorial rights. Basra TV stations even started showing Iran's Khuzestan province as part of Iraq's new province called 'Nasiriyyah', renaming all Iranian cities with Arabic names. Saddam continued with his anti Persian position against Iran with a speech at al-Mustansiriyyah University in Baghdad, on 02 April 1980, drawing parallels to the 7th-Century defeat of Persia in the Battle of al Qadisiyyah he announced:

*"In your name, brothers, and on behalf of the Iraqis and Arabs everywhere we tell those [Persian] cowards and dwarfs who try to avenge Al-Qadisiyah that the spirit of Al-Qadisiyah as well as the blood and honor of the people of Al-Qadisiyah who carried the message on their spearheads are greater than their attempts."*¹⁹

By raising, the issue of Khuzestan and the use of anti Persian rhetoric- Arab identity was elevated by Saddam. The raising of Arab identity was significant because the idea

of 'Arabism' had weakened in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab defeat- which brought to an end the Arab political project in the Middle East²⁰. Saddam took on the leadership mantle which had been left by Gamal Abdul Nasser and began to appeal to the Arab identity of the Arab people in order to create public support in the war against Iran. The war began to be depicted as one between the Arabs and non-Arabs (Persians) - this tactic worked as Iraq gained the support of the overwhelming number of Arab states in the war, except for Syria and Libya²¹. This refusal by Syria and Libya to support Iraq was motivated by ideology and their own regional ambitions and importantly showed the failure of Arab identity to unite the whole Arab world in opposition to Iran. Iran did not remain idle but played the same tactics against the Iraqi regime²². Iran attempted to destabilize Iraq and encouraged Kurdish nationalists to break up the country in the South, in answer to Iraq's similar activities in Iran's Khuzestan province. In addition Iran used religion to fight the tide of 'Arabism' which was being fermented by Iraq. Therefore Iran projected the war as an Islamic war against a secular regime which was oppressive and unjust.

The war lasted for 8 years and its regional impact was great in raising identity politics into the forefront of the political medium in the Persian Gulf. A number of identities came to the forefront in the region- Arab identity, Kurdish identity, Baluchi identity, Sunni identity, Persian identity and even Shiite identity which had surfaced during the late 1970s was in fact strengthened during the course of the Iran-Iraq war. Iran appealed to Shiite communities throughout the Gulf to rebel against ruling regimes which were supporting Iraq in the war. This strengthened the Shiite identity in the region. In addition Iran encouraged Iraqi Shiite not to fight against its own brethren in Iran and to rebel against the unjust and oppressive Saddam regime. Iraq not only played on the Arab card in the Persian Gulf to create support it also encouraged alternative ethnic groups which later would cause problems for the Iraqi regime. Saddam encouraged the Kurdish population in Iran to rebel internally in order to aid the Iraqi cause. This would be a mistake on behalf of the Iraqi regime as it would provide impetus for its own Kurdish population to dream of independence and separation from the central Iraqi government in the future.

The war had raised the hidden complexities of identity in the Persian Gulf – with religious and ethnic identities gaining prominence within and across nation states in

the region. Tensions were apparent within the Persian Gulf states between different religious and ethnic identities and between states within the region. The 'Pandora's box' had been opened with the emerging outcome being uncontrollable and causing a number of problems for states in the Persian Gulf. The simplistic solution of throwing money at a problem was no longer workable in the Persian Gulf as the genre of identity politics had been raised.

3) The Second Gulf War- Iraqi invasion of Kuwait-1991

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 was justified on the basis of territorial claims to Kuwaiti land but clearly greed and power were instrumental behind the invasion. This invasion in fact destroyed the slight revival of 'Arabism' in the Middle East- which had resurfaced during the Iran-Iraq war. One Arab country invading another in fact ended this idea of 'Arab brotherhood' and was reinforced by the Arab states supporting the US in its war against fellow Arab brethren in Iraq. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait brought to the forefront the crisis of Arab identity but also importantly raised the spectre of identity politics in the Persian Gulf- with ethnic and religious groupings gaining more momentum in their quests for greater political rights and autonomy. Following the defeat of Iraq in 1991 Baghdad was forced to submit to a series of United Nation resolutions (UN) which enforced a cruel, debilitating and inhumane stranglehold on the country that lasted 12 years. During this period, Iraq was portrayed as a collection of diverse ethnic and religious groups bound together not by some notion of common citizenship in a single unified political state but by the coercive force of one of these "minorities."²³ Soon Western policy-makers were talking of a safe haven for the Kurds in the North and a similar form of protection for the Shiite below in the South. The Sunni Arabs meanwhile were doomed to be held guilty by association with the former regime and all its evils. However, the fragmentation of the image of Iraq did not stop with the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds. Increasingly we began to hear of the plights of other religious and ethnic communities in Iraq, such as the Turkomans, the Chaldeans, the Yazidis and the Sabaeans.

The architects of the Iraqi society of the future had a curious approach to its component elements. The Kurds, for example, were regarded as an ethnic national entity requiring a just solution to the Kurdish question that secures their right to self-

determination within an appropriate political framework, whether federal or otherwise²⁴. However, the Arabs were accorded a different treatment. Rather than regarding them as a religious and ethnic whole bound by historical, linguistic and cultural bonds and inspired by common ideals they were dissected on the basis of religious creed and denomination.

The ramifications of this dissection of the mosaic of Iraq had wider implications in the Persian Gulf. It provided the impetus for political demands for the Kurdish population in Iran who also wanted the same safe haven granted to the Kurdish population in Iraq. Also the Kurdish question was raised in Syria and Turkey in response to the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq. In addition the Shiites in Iraq were given political rights unprecedented in contemporary Iraqi history through its safe haven in the South and this inspired similar demands from Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf- stretching from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia. Therefore it was no longer sufficient for Persian Gulf States to dismiss the issue of the Shiites or deal with the Shiites through the use of force but the question of Shiite political identity had to be addressed. One way of addressing the Shiite issue was to engage in a process of state political liberalisation, in order to open up the political system to allow representation, with the hope of diffusing the internal political frustration which had been built up over the years. One began to see the Shiites leading the political opposition in Bahrain, entrance of Shiites into parliament in Kuwait and a beginning of a process of accommodation between the Saudi government and its Shiite population²⁵. Although a number of justifications can be brought to explain the limited political liberalisation one witnessed in the Persian Gulf during the 1990s, there is no doubt that the need to deal with the identity crisis which had the capacity of causing major political instability was central behind the 'Persian Spring' which one witnessed. Therefore the impact of what followed the second Gulf War was to strengthen identity politics but importantly led to a reaction by Persian Gulf states to try to deal with the issue of identity in order to maintain political stability.

4) The Third Gulf War- US invasion of Iraq- 2003

The US led coalition war against Iraq, the results of which were a foregone conclusion, lasted only 42 days. It opened on 20 March 2003 with an intensive aerial bombardment and ended with the occupation of Baghdad²⁶. This invasion not only

toppled the regime which had ruled Iraq for the past 35 years, it toppled the entire edifice of the Iraqi state as it dismantled its military and security apparatuses and destroyed its vital urban and economic infrastructure. Even cultural institutions, such as museums, libraries and universities, were not spared destruction.

With the elimination of the state, religious and ethnic affiliations reasserted themselves more forcefully than ever- making identity politics a major force in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Indeed, the fragmentation of authority in the absence of an overarching unifying authority perhaps best sums up the pitiful condition to which Iraq has been reduced. As certain religious and ethnic forces staked their place in "the new composition" they were not about to relinquish their newly found powers and privileges.

Religious and ethnic tensions mounted considerably under Paul Bremer's rule. Across the religious and ethnic Shiite-Sunni, Kurdish-Turkoman, Arab-Kurdish- Christian-Chaldean divides, barricades had been erected. Narrow partisanship and selfishness manifested Iraqi society- with religious and ethnic groupings merely concerned with their own well being and what political rights they could gain from the new Iraq which was being constructed right before them.

The second post-occupation phase, which was conducted nominally under joint US-international auspices with Iraqi participation, brought the interim law for the administration of Iraq (8 March 2004), the handover of power to the Iraqis on 30 June 2004, and UN Security Council resolution 1546 defining the role and powers of the multinational force under US command. These measures paved the way for the elections that were held on 30 January 2005²⁷. This phase was marked by considerable anxiety and mounting turmoil. The parties that had obtained certain privileges as ethnic or religious groups fought to secure their advantages by appealing to the street through the electoral process. The US declared the elections to be legitimate in the sense that they were held in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1546 and the national administration law, however the elections cannot be said to have been comprehensive or fully legitimate as they were boycotted by some governorates and by several sectors of the population, especially the Sunni who did not want the elections to proceed under occupation of Iraq. Also there was a fear that the Shiite would dominate the electoral outcome gaining the bigger slice of the cake

in the new Iraqi political system. The third phase of the occupation was also characterised by the growing momentum of the resistance movement. The US and multinational forces were unable to halt the mounting material and moral attrition on their forces and to restore even a semblance of security. As a result, the elections were held under an extremely fraught climate and government formation was beset with a number of problems.

The identity politics- the religious and ethnic equations were the primary obstacle to the election of the speaker and vice-speakers of the National Assembly and, hence, the formation of the new government. Once the government was finally declared, it came under harsh criticism, from the various religious and ethnic groupings for not being representative of their interests. Therefore the government plagued by the wrangling between demographic groupings was debilitated and paralysed from the outset. Perhaps the Lebanese multi-confessional system offers the most telling indication of what laid in store for Iraq: mounting inter-religious and ethnic tensions, growing fragmentation and a declining spirit of citizenship with the increasing pre-eminence of religious and ethnic political identities. The war is no doubt responsible for this phenomenon, through the abolishment of the state apparatus and its military and security services. Identity politics and the ensuing jostling for political resources and power are all impediments to the objective of social and political stability. The Iraqi elections in December 2005 demonstrated the significant role of identity politics in Iraq. During Electoral campaigning Sunni candidates typically demanded an immediate end to the hated occupation and promised to protect their tribes and co-religionists from Shiite and Kurdish domination. Shiites and Kurds also coveted their group identities. The poor performance of more secular and nationalistic parties that were expected to show some crossover appeal -- such as former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's list -- highlighted the prominent role identity politics has come to place in Iraq²⁸. The problems of the new elected Iraqi parliament, to form a government is further evidence of the ethnic and religious divisions that have strengthened since the toppling of Saddam. Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite tensions have been apparent over ministerial appointments, especially in relation to the position of Prime Minister²⁹. These three groupings have come to dominate the new Iraqi political landscape resulting in the creation of effective religious and ethnic zones in Iraq; with the new

Iraqi constitution setting the process for federalism in Iraq it is likely that a talk of a united Iraq is going to be a further misnomer into the future.

The strengthening of identity politics in Iraq has had a regional impact in the Persian Gulf. For example in Iran the calls for Kurdish³⁰ and Arab separatism have escalated- with demands gaining more media coverage than ever before. A potential Iraqi federal state has had a knock on effect in Iran- with ethnic groupings making stronger political demands than before. In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah has made a point of meeting Shiite leaders and addressing certain grievances due to the ascendancy of the Shiite in Iraqi politics. Therefore it no longer sufficient for Shiite demands to be neglected, with the Shiite in power in neighbouring Iraq- it has raised the bargaining power of Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf and made ruling regimes more willing to listen. In addition the calls for ethnic separatism are growing in Turkey and Syria- clearly connected to ethnic assertion in Iraq. Identity politics is a key component in the Persian Gulf and has spread to other quarters of the Middle East.

Conclusion

The rise of identity politics in the Persian Gulf has raised a number of practical implications, such as the creation of ethnic and religious zones, leading to the fragmentation of existing nation states in the region. For example, in Iraq a tri-polarisation of identity has been firmly established- with Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni zones creating a cleavage and instable society in Iraq. The rise of the Shiite in Iraq has added vitality to Shiite movements across the Persian Gulf strengthening Shiite identity and leading to fears of a Shiite crescent forming. This rise in power of the Shiite has in fact strengthened the Sunni and Kurdish identities in Iraq and the Persian Gulf as they fight to preserve their positions in the midst of the growing influence and power of the Shiite². In the wider Middle East implications are dire as ethnic and religious groupings have exerted themselves in the aftermath of the removal of Saddam. For example Turkey and Syria recently have been beset by clashes with their respective Kurdish populations who are demanding greater rights, inspired by the Kurds in Iraq. In fact the demand for autonomy by the Kurds in Iraq has been met with resistance from Syria and Turkey out of fear of similar demands being made by

² This has added to further instability in Iraq as different ethnic and religious groupings compete with one another for power and influence in society.

their own Kurdish populations³¹. Therefore not only does the case of Iraq provide a clear demonstration of the practical implications of identity politics for stability in Iraq but also the entire Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East.

If one looks to the future the practical implications for stability look severe, due to the likelihood of identity politics gaining more momentum in the Persian Gulf for 3 main reasons. Firstly due to the West's ensuing confrontation with Iran over its nuclear programme, it is possible that the West is likely to use a strategy of encouraging ethnic and religious discontent as one saw during the 1990s in Iraq³². Iran has several non-Persian minorities such as the Ahwazi Arabs (4.5 million- South West Iran), Iranian Baluchis (between 500,000 and 1 million- Baluchistan provinces on Iran's border with Pakistan), Iranian Kurds (between 4 and 7 million- Western Iran and Iraqi border) and Azeris (16 million – border with Azerbaijan and the Iraqi border)³³. This diversity in Iran leaves the door open to potential instability and fragmentation of Iran similar to the situation in Iraq today³⁴. This fear of instability was echoed by the Iranian Ambassador to Ankara in an interview with Turkish newspaper Millet on the 3rd of April 2006. He stated that he expressed worry of the establishment of ethnic states in the region as a result of US foreign policy- with the possibility of a greater Kurdistan, which would affect stability in Turkey, Syria and Iran.³⁵ Secondly, identity politics is likely to be strengthened due to the growing access to information and communication technology (ICT), which includes satellite and internet services which allows access to information concerning ethnic and religious separatist and secessionist movements in the region. Therefore, allowing ethnic and religious diasporas in the Persian Gulf and wider Middle East to identify with religious and ethnic affiliates in different parts of the region. This is to facilitate the creation of ethnic and religious zones, leading to inevitable fissions and tensions emerging in the Persian Gulf and the wider the Middle East. In addition satellite channels specifically aimed towards certain ethnic and religious groups will add vitality to the issue of identity politics. For example, there are various satellite and internet services in the Kurdish language (i.e. KurdSat, Kurdistan TV and Medya TV and KurdishMedia.com)³⁶ strengthening the idea of Kurdish identity and Al-Manar satellite TV³⁷ has been important in raising Shiite identity across the Middle East. Thirdly, economic failure of Persian Gulf States in delivering employment and improving living standards is likely to further exacerbate the issue of identity politics-

leading to ethnic and religious groupings becoming dissatisfied with the state due to its inability to look after their needs. This is likely to lead to ethnic and religious groups looking after their own affairs rather than relying upon what is viewed as an incompetent state. This is likely to be facilitated by the fact that certain ethnic and religious groupings are located in economically rich areas- such as the Shiite in South Iraq, Kurdish in North Iraq³⁸, and Shiite in East Saudi Arabia, which have oil under their feet. In addition the Kurds in Iran are agriculturally rich and no doubt could rely on their Kurdish Brethren in Iraq for financial assistance through the sale of oil. The above 3 reasons are likely to facilitate the creation of ethnic and religious zones in the Persian Gulf in the future, leading to inevitable instability as competing ethnic and religious groupings demand a greater voice, rights and representation.

¹ See, Luciani, Giacomo (1988), "Economic Foundations of Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Arab World in Comparative Perspective." In: Arab Studies Quarterly, Vol. 10/4, pp. 457-475. Luciani, Giacomo (1994), "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State and Democratization." In: Ghassan Salamé (ed.), Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World. London: I.B.Tauris. pp. 130-155. Luciani, Giacomo (1995), "Resources, Revenues, and Authoritarianism in the Arab World: Beyond the Rentier State? In: Brynne, Rex, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (eds.), Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Vol. 1, Theoretical Perspectives. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. pp. 211-227. Beblawi, Hazem (1990), "The Rentier State in the Arab World." In: Giacomo Luciani (ed.), The Arab State. London. pp. 85-98. Gause, Gregory (1994), Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

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