

May 2023

Call for proposals: Research paper on GCC states' influence and role in the normalization with Syria

Background

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a political foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. The KAS has more than 100 offices worldwide that run civic education programs aimed at promoting freedom, peace and justice based on the principles of liberal democracy and social market economy. The KAS Lebanon office, founded in 2015 in Beirut, works on topics with political, social and economic relevance in Lebanon including political reforms and participation, transparency, accountability, socioeconomic development, entrepreneurship and innovation. In this regard, the KAS Lebanon office conducts a diverse array of activities and projects as well as publishes research and analyses about the most pressing and timely political issues.

As of 2023, the Lebanon office's mandate was furthermore extended to deal with issues of flight and migration in the Levant region. Especially the repercussions of the civil war in Syria are felt throughout the region and need to be addressed if tenable solutions for greater stability and prosperity ought to be found. In this regard, the KAS Lebanon office seeks to further knowledge about the root causes of flight, and migration as well as sustainable paths for reconciliation between host and refugee communities, conflict transformation and political solutions for regional peace and stability.

Research Context

In May 2023, Arab states agreed to readmit Syria into the Arab League. While for the past 12 years Bashar al-Assad had been isolated from the Arab world due to his brutal crackdown on opponents during the country's civil war, the regional calculus of some Arab states now seems to be shifting. Here, especially Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states appear to play a shaping role in determining the direction and pace of the ongoing normalization efforts. While an early sign of swaying stances showed when the United Arab Emirates normalized relations with Damascus in 2018, the warming of regional ties did not gain much traction until the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) threw its political weight and clout behind rapprochement efforts in recent months. Particularly in view of the Chinese-brokered reestablishment of ties between the KSA and Iran, which had backed opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, the Saudi's approach towards Syria appears to have shifted, leading the two countries to reopen their embassies and reviving diplomatic relations.

On the other hand, among the most steadfast opponents to normalization is another GCC state, namely Qatar. Together with Kuwait it is among several Arab states that have opposed Syria's readmission into the Arab League, emphasizing that the circumstances that led to Syria's expulsion in 2011 have remained unchanged. Apart from making normative claims and calls for accountability over the Assad's regime committed war crimes, opponents have furthermore argued that concessions regarding crucial issues - the return of Syrian refugees and illicit drug smuggling, amongst others - need to be made by Assad and a roadmap to resolve the manifold Syrian crises laid out before Damascus should be welcomed back into the Arab fold.

Objective

Against the backdrop of the recent and ongoing developments towards normalization, the objective of the research is to explore the relations between Syria and the GCC states (with focus on the most important players among them but, where needed, making references to other Arab and non-Arab states as well) and to shed light on relevant issues including but not limited to:

- GCC states' (stated and underlying) interests in Syria and, by extension, the region.
- GCC states' stance towards normalization with Syria in alignment or in conflict with other regional and international actors.
- The leverage GCC states may or may not hold when it comes to influencing other states' behavior towards Syria.
- The leverage and the political will they may or may not hold when it comes to resolving the manifold Syrian crises within and outside of Syria's borders.
- The effects a full-fledged normalization (beyond a mere diplomatic level) would have for Syrians and the role GCC states may play in aiding Syria's economic reconstruction.
- Future outlook and prospects

Deliverables

A research paper with approximately **10,000 – 12,000 words** on the above-mentioned topic to be delivered until the **31st of August 2023**.

Submission

Interested candidates should send:

1. A two-page **research abstract** with a clearly formulated research structure, budget and methodology. The latter should consist of an in-depth review of primary and secondary literature and ideally utilize the author's own network as a primary source to obtain novel information and/or conduct interviews with experts, policy makers and other relevant actors.
2. An up-to-date **curriculum vitae** showing their experience as a researcher, expertise on the mentioned topic as well as any other relevant information.

The application should be submitted by email to **anne.bauer@kas.de**. The deadline is **6th of June 2023**.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

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