

Persian Gulf states have new role to play in Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution

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The shifting regional geopolitics of the Middle East have created new opportunities for the Persian Gulf states to engage in Arab-Israeli conflict resolution, according to a new paper from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

"The Gulf States and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resolution," authored by Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, proposes a set of policy recommendations on how the Gulf states can engage with regional and international partners to create new pathways for action and cooperation. Ulrichsen is the fellow for the Middle East at the Baker Institute, who specializes in the political, economic and security trends of the Middle East and the changing position of Persian Gulf states in the global order.

"The late August announcement of a cease-fire to end the latest round of violence in Gaza offers an opportune moment to devise fresh approaches to Arab-Israeli conflict resolution," Ulrichsen said. "Moreover, the changing landscape of Middle East politics provides multiple points of entry for discrete, issue-specific and technocratic-led cooperation among all principal regional states. Above all, the emergence of the Gulf states as proactive regional actors makes it imperative for international actors and multilateral agencies to identify ways of working together in pursuit of a common objective."

There is little to no formal state-to-state contact between the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—and Israel; geographically, the Gulf states are not, and have never been, "frontline states" in the Arab-Israeli dispute, Ulrichsen said. His paper documents a range of mechanisms that can, and in fact already do, constitute a practical basis for involving the Gulf states in regional mediation and conflict resolution initiatives.

These range from the projection both of direct and indirect influence over the various Palestinian factions to quiet cooperation on technocratic and "nonpolitical" issues such as energy and water. Moreover, the Saudi proposed Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 remains the most comprehensive and credible plan to bring about a durable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ulrichsen said. In the 12 years since the plan was

unveiled, a realignment of regional geopolitics has created a convergence of interest between most GCC states and Israel over issues such as the Muslim Brotherhood, violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL), Iran and Arab Spring challenges to the status quo. "GCC states' responses to the political upheaval combined a more expansive capability with greater policy intent and positioned them at the heart of regional policymaking as the Middle East and North Africa emerge unsteadily from the Arab Spring," Ulrichsen said.

He concluded: "As regional powers with a wide array of political and economic leverage, the Gulf states can play a significant role that goes beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance in conflict-afflicted environments to encompass a range of innovative [conflict resolution](#) tools as well."

More information: Paper: [bakerinstitute.org/media/files ... b-PolicyReport61.pdf](http://bakerinstitute.org/media/files...b-PolicyReport61.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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