

Day 1: Sunday, 7 November 2021

Inaugural Session, 9:00 am - 9:15 am

Inaugural Address

Mahjoob Zweiri, Director, Gulf Studies Center, College of Arts and Science, Qatar University

Luciano Zaccara, Research Coordinator, Politics and Security in the Gulf, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University

Guest Speaker, 9:15 am-9:45 am

Bulent Aras, Senior Scholar at Istanbul Policy Center at Sabanci University and Visiting Professor of International Relations, Qatar University

Turkey and the GCC region in the aftermath of Al-Ula Summit

Abstract: The Al-Ula Summit of January 5, 2021, officially brought the most recent Gulf crisis to an end after almost four years. Saudi Arabia's leadership was crucial in the GCC decision to normalize relations with Qatar. Last-minute Kuwaiti shuttle diplomacy flattened the road for the Qatari emir's participation, which ensured the reopening of diplomatic and transportation links prior to the summit. The Saudis seem to have controlled the Emirati and Egyptian opposition to normalization without concessions, implying that their ideological repugnance for the Qatar-radical-Islamist nexus had not disappeared. While the normalization is perhaps overly optimistic, as the resolution does not contain references to the roots of the crisis, Qatar has yet to announce any changes in its foreign policy.

The ending of the diplomatic rift was generally seen as a goodwill offering to the incoming Biden administration and a signal of Saudi readiness to address common threats—i.e., Iran—in a cooperative manner. This move was pursuant to a number of Saudi initiatives to reshape the image of Mohammed bin Salman as a more suitable partner to US interests, including the prince's own project: to build an “environmentally friendly” city. In that sense, this might be construed as a flashback to King Salman's debut, when he sidelined the MB threat and tried to focus on rolling back Iran in cooperation with Qatar and Turkey under the banner of “Sunni Islam.” Yet, even pre-crisis dynamics have largely melted away, and singling out the Iranian threat might not ensure Gulf unity today. Without a more consensual settlement of the dispute that in the end would bring all parties to a sustainable resolution, three factors could reopen the rift with Qatar. As a result, the Al-Ula declaration should be read as an incomplete first step toward normalization. Restoring stability and security would entail taking broader steps such as a constructive dialogue, not only with Turkey and Iran but also other stakeholders such as China, Russia, and the EU. This paper will explore the implications of the Gulf normalization process on Turkish foreign policy towards the region. It will discuss two ways interactions--from Turkey to region and vice versa--in this dynamic setting, which will be more likely to restructure the regional rivalry patterns rather than making it disappear.



Bio: Bülent Aras is Visiting Professor at Qatar University and Senior Expert at Center for International Policy Research. He is also Senior Scholar and Coordinator of the Conflict Resolution and Mediation stream at Istanbul Policy Center and Research Professor of International relations at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. His writings include *Turkey's State Crisis* (Syracuse, 2021) and *Arab Spring, Turkey and Beyond* (Routledge, 2016).

