

# EDA WORKING PAPER

## Executive Summary

## The Practice and Theory of Stabilisation in the Arab Gulf States

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- Over the past decade, Arab Gulf States have emerged as increasingly pro-active and influential foreign policy actors in the wider Middle East and North Africa. Pushed by a confluence of regional crises and pulled by the vacuum left by the withdrawal of other actors, they have heavily focused on the need to restore “stability” in the wider region.
- Their embrace of regional “stability” as the ultimate end of foreign policy, has coincided with a shift towards “stabilisation” as the new focus for international crisis management. While Arab Gulf States have enthusiastically embraced both concepts, they have at times remained vague about how to conceptualise and operationalise either of them.
- In this context, this EDA Working paper seeks to come to a better understanding of the practice of stabilisation amongst Arab Gulf States, as well as the theories that inform their vision of stability, while recognising the significant differences in their approaches.
- In order to do so, the paper traces the way that Arab Gulf States have sought to promote regional stability over time, identifying a clear shift from a narrow reliance on bilateral assistance as a tool to foster limited foreign policy goals, towards a more comprehensive and ambitious crisis management approach that effectively combines a broad spectrum of hard and soft power tools to reach more ambitious objectives.
- Despite a notable absence of publicly available stabilisation doctrines amongst Arab Gulf States, their recent actions across various crises have followed some clear principles:
  - o Arab Gulf States consider stabilisation as a political rather than a technical process. As such, their crisis management focus has not been on limited technical support, but on influencing the shape of long-term political settlements.
  - o While their stabilisation engagement has been comprehensive, combining hard and soft power tools, it has not always been integrated.
  - o Even though Arab Gulf States have started to make more substantial contributions to multilateral instruments, they continue to prefer bilateral means of engagement, preferring coalitions of the willing over multilateral approaches.
  - o There has been a strong focus amongst Arab Gulf States regularly on working with sub-national partners in order to influence the shape of future settlements.
  - o Despite this, Arab Gulf States have adopted an often rigid definition of legitimacy, highlighting the need to preserve the state and strengthening institutions.
  - o While Arab Gulf State have sought to foster local compromises, they have also formulated sometimes rigid red lines on the shape of any political settlement.
- As a result, and despite their emphasis on stabilisation, the crisis management approaches adopted by Arab Gulf States are often closer to the more ambitious state-building narratives that have gone out of fashion amongst their western partners.
- While doing so, Arab Gulf States have shed the Weberian view that was central to previous western visions of the region, advocating what appears to be a post-Weberian vision of the state instead that redefines the classical Weberian view of legitimacy.
- For the UAE that suggests that in order to better explain its foreign policies and ambitions to the outside world, the UAE ought to carefully articulate a more comprehensive doctrine and visions of its stabilisation efforts across the region. This requires careful definition of the UAE’s vision of “stability” and “the State” from a theoretical perspective and how these tie into the UAE’s foreign policy agenda.