ABSTRACT

The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council have emerged as powerful global players in recent years. The breadth and depth of Gulf States’ enhanced engagement in global issues extends from energy governance to the politics of climate change and the debate over reforms to the global financial architecture. This has propelled them into the global arena largely on their own terms, but has not been accompanied by any substantive identification with the notion of ‘global governance.’ State-centric visions of inter-state cooperation, rather than attachment to normative concepts of global governance, still motivate GCC policymakers to project their interests globally, primarily in order to bolster their domestic and regional position. Nevertheless this engagement is taking place within a rapidly globalizing environment in which complex interdependencies have emerged that bind the Gulf states to global structures and provide the parameters for their engagement within the international community.

This paper expands on these interdependencies and explores the practical implications of Gulf perspectives on, and engagement with, global issues and the shifting governance of globalization. It highlights an important distinction between economic globalization, which is embraced, and its political and cultural dimensions, which are resisted. Gulf perspectives focus on the ‘governance of globalization’ rather than normative attachment to concepts of global governance, which suggest a hierarchical order that undermines state sovereignty. The first section of the paper will explore the historical and contemporary processes through which the concept of global governance is filtered, and documents the contestation of that term in regional discourse. It then focuses on three key issues – the partial embedding of ‘global values’, financial architectural reform, and energy governance initiatives and the politics of climate change – to operationalize and map the nature and intent of Gulf states’ involvement in the governance of globalization on a practical and real-life (rather than theoretical) level.