

# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) OFFICE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

By Dr. John Duke Anthony

At the invitation of King Salman of Saudi Arabia, leaders of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries met with U.S. President Barack Obama on Thursday, April 21 in Riyadh for a U.S.-GCC Summit.

One of Obama's primary goals for the summit was to reassure these U.S. strategic allies and partners that the United States is committed to countering threats to the GCC.

## U.S. Statements of Intentions

The president could not have been clearer in stating that, "I reaffirm the policy of the United States to use all elements of our power to secure our core interests in the Gulf region and to deter and confront external aggression against our allies and our partners."



President Barack Obama met with Gulf Cooperation Council leaders in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on April 21, 2016. The summit meeting came almost a year after Obama hosted his GCC counterparts in the United States for a summit at Camp David.

Photo: The White House.

In the same vein, Obama was tough on Iran in his rhetoric, **noting** that the United States, even with its nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic, has “serious concerns about Iranian behavior.”

Obama and the GCC leaders also spoke about other issues including ISIS, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, and Lebanon.

King Salman **said** the summit was “constructive and fruitful” and thanked Obama for “enhancing the consultation and cooperation between the GCC countries and the U.S.”

States and the GCC – at least in words. Yet the rhetoric was backed by plans for action.

The leaders agreed to continue close coordination on shared concerns via meetings of foreign and defense ministers, hold an annual summit-level meeting, collaborate on additional security initiatives, and engage in a significant U.S.-GCC military exercise in 2017.

By any standard of measurement, this is quite a tall order of intended undertakings – ones that would be hard to match between the United States and any other sub-regional international



U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Dr. Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al Zayani conduct a joint press conference following a U.S.-GCC defense meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on April 20, 2016.  
Photo: U.S. Department of Defense.

Hence the summit appears to have assuaged some anxieties sparked by various media reports on the American side, clarified what some had viewed as misfortunate misunderstandings, and helped further solidify ties between the United

grouping of six neighboring countries anywhere, let alone those that line the eastern littoral of Arabia fronting what is arguably the world’s most globally vital region.

## Forthcoming Developments

According to the White House press office, the security exercise will “showcase the full breadth of U.S.-GCC security capabilities across all domains, and emphasize furthering the interoperability of U.S. and GCC forces and demonstrating joint, multilateral, and inter-government operations.”

The plans also include a twice-yearly meeting of the U.S.-GCC Strategic Working Group to advance cooperation on counterterrorism, cyber security, and other military and defense concerns. Moreover, the GCC leaders expressed interest in opening a GCC office in Washington, a move the United States welcomed. For the moment, though, the idea of opening a GCC office in Washington, D.C. is just that: an idea.

In my meetings last week with GCC officials in Riyadh, the thought is that the merits of having such an office in the capital of the world’s technologically, economically, financially, and militarily most powerful country are not yet self-evident to everyone who would be involved and have a say in the matter.

An important consideration in order for the idea to become a reality is the following. The merits of having such an office would have to be acknowledged as ones over and beyond the advantages derived from the existing bilateral relations between the six GCC countries and the United States. These are strong and are likely to remain so.

As such, the members will have to agree that there is additional strategic advantage and inter-organizational gain to warrant a separate office in the capital of their oldest and most internationally influential partner.

## Adding Value to the Relationship

As envisioned in the eyes of its supporters, not least among the merits of such an office would be its situation within the same time zone as the Secretariat’s innumerable American and numerous other international counterparts.

Among these counterparts, who would be but a short taxi ride away, are no small numbers that specialize in all of the same areas of functional cooperation for which the GCC has long been noted.

**GCC leaders expressed interest in opening a GCC office in Washington, a move the United States welcomed. For the moment, though, the idea of opening a GCC office in Washington, D.C. is just that: an idea.**

Moreover, the office’s representatives would be able to work more effectively in joint real time with these counterparts, and liaise as well as work in tandem with the professional staff assigned to the numerous international organizations that are based in or have representational offices in Washington.

## The European Union as Example

The establishment of a GCC office in the nation's capital, in the eyes of some observers, would be long overdue. The GCC has had a GCC Liaison Office in Brussels since 1993. This stemmed from the GCC and the European Community (as it was called then) establishing a formal Cooperation Agreement in 1988.

As Christian Koch wrote in 2014, “Since that period and especially since the decision by the GCC to implement a customs union, relations between the two sides have grown institutionally and become multi-faceted.”

“In addition to broader and deeper official contacts,” he added, “there is now also a series of project and exchange networks in place which have allowed for better people-to-people interaction.”

Such developments have long been lacking between the GCC member countries and the United States. For years on end, this was not for a dearth of desire or trying on the GCC side. To the contrary, the GCC Secretariat and its members expressed their eagerness decades ago. The U.S. reception, however, was lukewarm.

On the EU side, matters have hardly stood still. The EU established The Delegation of the European Union to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf in Riyadh in 2004. The office represents the EU to the GCC Secretariat and five of the six

GCC countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (an EU Delegation to the UAE opened in 2013).

## GCC Offices Internationally

In addition, the GCC has an office in Geneva housing its Permanent Delegation to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations. And while the GCC does have an office in the United States, in New York City, it is housed at the United Nations. There, however, the GCC is but one of 22 intergovernmental organizations (IGOs).



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Foreign Ministers from the Gulf Cooperation Council member countries, and the Secretary General of the GCC met for the fifth GCC-U.S. Strategic Cooperation Forum on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, New York, on September 30, 2015. Photo: U.S. Department of State.

Other UN-based international IGOs include the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, each with the status of Permanent Observer to the United Nations and each having a permanent office at UN headquarters.

A GCC physical presence in the United States is thus not yet connected to the country itself, but to a large international institution. A hurdle

to be crossed, therefore, would be separate accreditation for the diplomats who would be assigned to the GCC office were one to be established.

In addition to the positive features noted above, the benefits of having a GCC office in Washington have long been apparent to many business representatives, researchers, and governmental foreign policy practitioners.

## Enhancing Effective Communication

Those engaged day-to-day in building, strengthening, and expanding the U.S. economic, financial, technological, and educational relationship with the GCC are hampered by the two side's inability to communicate in real time – ours and theirs – as effectively as possible or as many would desire.

In a seven-day week, the two sides can speak with each other from and in their respective capitals and offices when each knows the other is in their respective office only four days a week: Monday through Thursday, and even

then there is a minimum seven- to nine-hour time difference. All the other days are out of the question.

The increased access each side would have to the other along with the people-to-people ties that would be generated by a GCC office in Washington would only serve to deepen GCC-U.S. ties.

A GCC office established in Washington would therefore be a much-welcomed, important, and overdue development. It would be difficult to imagine how such a breakthrough would not be able to aid the GCC member countries and the United States in further strengthening and expanding the public and private sectors of the GCC-U.S. partnership.

This will in turn help to foster the security, stability, peace, and prospects for prosperity – and to enhance respect for international organizations, international law, and human development – in Arabia and the Gulf, the broader Arab world, and the Middle East, which both peoples long for, and the world needs and deserves.

---

*Originally published on the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations' Arabia, the Gulf, & the GCC blog on May 2, 2016.*

---



**Dr. John Duke Anthony** is the Founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. On June 22, 2000, on the occasion of his first official state visit to the United States since succeeding his late father, H.M. King Muhammad VI of Morocco knighted Dr. Anthony. The Moroccan monarch and head of state bestowed upon Dr. Anthony the Medal of the Order of *Ouissam Alaouite*, Morocco's highest award for excellence. Dr. Anthony is the only American to have been invited to attend each of the GCC's Ministerial and Heads of State Summits since the GCC's inception in 1981.

For more information access the National Council's website: [ncusar.org](http://ncusar.org).