

# GCC summit in doubt as Gulf crisis continues

The Arab Weekly staff

London

**K**uwait Emir Sheikh Sabah Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah's recent visit to Saudi Arabia was an effort to persuade King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to attend meetings in Kuwait to save the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from collapsing because of the crisis with Qatar, Gulf sources said.

They said the Saudi position was clear that a summit couldn't be convened given the current situation. The kingdom, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, severed ties with Qatar on June 5 over what they described as Doha's interference in their countries' internal affairs and its support for radical groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, designated as a terrorist organisation in all four countries.

Kuwait, along with fellow GCC member Oman, has been neutral during the dispute and has been a mediator in the crisis but with little apparent success.

The sources added that Riyadh doesn't believe the GCC will collapse if the summit is postponed until the matter is resolved in Qatar, either through its acceptance of demands issued by the Arab quartet or a leadership change.

Sheikh Sabah and King Salman discussed "regional developments and a number of issues of common concern" during the October 16 meeting, Saudi Arabia's official news agency, SPA, reported.

Gulf diplomatic circles said Sheikh Sabah tried to persuade GCC members that the unity of the body is more important than differences that can be overcome over time. However, the likelihood of convincing the quartet appears unlikely.

"The four countries boycotting Qatar, especially Saudi Arabia, will not accept a compromise with Qatar. There is no grey area in this matter," Saudi researcher Salman al-Ansari said.

"Saudi Arabia is undoubtedly keen on preserving the unity of the



**Common concerns.** Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (R) welcomes Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah in Riyadh, on October 16. (Saudi Press Agency)

Gulf Cooperation Council, but Qatar has become a bad apple that if not isolated will spoil its surroundings."

Reports in Arab media stated that the annual GCC summit, scheduled for December in Kuwait, might be postponed or relocated to Riyadh.

The London-based online publication Elaph reported its sources said a GCC summit in December was unlikely because the dispute continues.

**● Riyadh doesn't believe the GCC will collapse if the summit is postponed until the matter is resolved in Qatar.**

The publication's sources reportedly said, if a summit were to be called, it would be in Riyadh and that an invitation would not be extended to Qatar, despite statements by Doha that a Gulf summit couldn't be held without Qatar.

A Washington-based source told Elaph that Gulf Arab countries might form a new council starting with three countries whose policies would be unified and aimed at working for the benefit and interests of the region.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a think-tank in London, said the dispute might have permanently damaged the GCC because of "the strident nature of the public diplomacy on both sides."

"Qexit – the prospect of Qatar leaving the GCC – has not yet become an accepted neologism but it was openly discussed. The UAE, in particular, has argued vociferously for a new set of relations in the Gulf," IISS said.

## Yemen's rebel alliance rift continues to widen as questions arise about ex-president's health

Saleh Baidhani

Sana'a

**A** television interview with former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh hinted at his desire to leave the country as his health remains a focus of public concern.

The former president looked fatigued during the short interview. He had undergone an operation at a Sana'a hospital on October 13 after a Russian medical team was flown in to perform it, government sources said.

In the interview, Saleh said he was considering accepting an in-

invitation from a Russian think-tank to attend a seminar on Yemen focusing on terrorism and Yemen's future. Asked whether he would leave Yemen for further medical treatment, Saleh said he would not.

Dismissing the interview as a farce, Yemeni political analyst Faris al-Bel said Saleh conveniently forgot to mention the UN travel ban against him and tried to appear to be a decision-maker, contemplating whether to participate in the seminar in Russia.

The appearance was Saleh's first interview with mainstream Yemeni media since the operation. Reports said Saleh's health had deteriorated because of complications from a 2011 assassination attempt.

Questions regarding the former president's health came at a time the alliance between his General People's Congress (GPC) and the Iran-allied Houthi rebels seems to be deteriorating.

In 2015, three years after stepping down as Yemen's president, Saleh joined forces with his former enemies and together they seized Sana'a, forcing the internationally recognised government to flee. That ignited the current war, which has claimed more than 10,000 lives, UN estimates state.



**Declining player.** Yemen's former President Ali Abdullah Saleh (C) is surrounded by guards as he attends a rally in Sana'a, last August. (Reuters)

The former president has, for all practical purposes, been under house arrest since August 24. A Yemeni politician said this was a turning point for Saleh, and that threats to him and his family have made him seriously consider leaving Sana'a for the first time since his return in September 2011.

Tensions between the two factions escalated after both held rallies that ended in clashes. The altercations in Sana'a resulted in the death of Colonel Khaled al-Radhi, a member of Saleh's inner circle and the GPC's vice-president of external relations. Radhi was killed at a Houthi checkpoint after an argu-

ment between his convoy and the rebels escalated into a shoot-out, local reports said.

A few days after Saleh's TV interview, the GPC threatened to end its alliance with the Houthis. In a statement, party Secretary-General Arif al-Zouka accused the rebels of monopolising the decision-making process, while targeting ministers, politicians and journalists affiliated with the party.

Zouka described the acts as "irresponsible terrorist practices, intellectually and politically," in a message on the Aden al-Ghad newspaper's website.

"This is unequivocal evidence that you do not have a genuine desire to keep the partnership unless you are in full control," he said in the letter addressed to the militia's political council.

The situation should not be a surprise considering that the alliance between the two factions is a marriage of convenience and that there is a long, bloody history between the Houthis and the GPC. The last decade of Saleh's 34 years as Yemen's president saw his government constantly at war with the Iran-allied militia.

Saleh Baidhani is an Arab Weekly contributor in Sana'a.

**● Saleh's party accused the Houthis of "irresponsible terrorist practices, intellectually and politically."**