The Gulf Cooperation Council has completed eight years of its existence. In terms of its evolution, these years constitute the first phase of its life cycle. The Council was born in the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war. With the cessation of hostilities and the prospects for peace becoming brighter, the first phase comes to an end paving way for the next in the new context. Indeed in the emerging context, the parameters of cooperation would change in their intensity and emphasis.

The GCC's experience during the last eight years appears to be instructive in more than one way. It defies many stereotypes of inter-state relations in a regional organisation. It has underlined that the intensity of structural asymmetries is greater than regime compatibility in determining the level of cooperation. Hence despite common threat perception of identity of views on foreign policy issues, the output remained moderate. Similarly there is not sufficient evidence to claim that the GCC functions under the hegemony of Saudi Arabia, nor to support that small states have joined it to minimise the influence of Saudi Arabia on regional affairs. Such uncomfortable inferences emerged from an extensive scrutiny of the proceedings of the Council, its summits and meetings of the various ministers, viz., foreign, defence, commerce, finance, internal security, etc.
Before introducing the scheme and premises of the thesis, perhaps an explanation is needed about its voluminous size. The present study attempts to understand the genesis, evolution and prospects of regional cooperation among the oil-rich Gulf states in a holistic perspective. Since such an endeavour is attempted with multiple objectives, a study focusing on one aspect may provide the pleasure of vigour but would be deficient in making one conversant with the nuances which govern the making or breaking of an organization. Certainly this is not an attempt to make a path-breaking analysis on theorisation of regional cooperation. On the contrary, it is a modest effort to provide a comprehensive and authentic account of the developments which led to GCC's creation and of behaviour of the member states which contributed to its achievements. In addition, this study grew in size because the material used here is largely drawn from the sources of the region to which not many English-speaking scholars have access. It may be mentioned here that many years of stay in Kuwait with the Indian Embassy provided me with ample opportunities to go through these sources. Knowledge of Arabic further facilitated my task. Even while preparing the thesis in India, I have had occasions to visit the region and meet the scholars and consult the documents on the region which proved a very useful input in the structuring of these two volumes.
This thesis has been divided into five parts whose contents are briefly as follows. The first part begins with a detailed review of the various developments, both at the regional level as well as international, which contributed to GCC's establishment. It then goes on to analyse the main results and repercussions of the various meetings held by GCC's heads of state as well as its foreign ministers until the end of July 1989. This part also deals with the growth of intra-GCC harmonization in the political field. Part II is devoted to a study of the meetings held by GCC ministers of defence and internal security and analyses whether any tangible progress was achieved by these states in strengthening cooperation among them in these two crucial areas. The third part reviews the deliberations of GCC ministers of Finance and Commerce and examines the measures taken by the member states to boost inter-se economic cooperation. The fourth part deals with future prospects for the GCC while the fifth part consists of conclusions based on the preceding chapters.

Though the Arab world has been no stranger to unions, mergers and confederations during the last four decades, creation of the GCC was in some ways a unique phenomenon. Apart from the bonds of ethnicity, religion and language, the member states shared a number of common features ranging from analogous economic environment to similarity of external
perspectives. No group of Arab states is as homogeneous as the GCC members are. Moreover, relations among the GCC members have been marked by a high degree of cordiality and warmth since the era of oil-based renaissance began in this region in the 1950s. In view of this background, there was every expectation that the GCC members would face little difficulty in adopting a common defence strategy, in boosting their security links and in integrating their economies within the framework of the unified economic agreement.

This thesis reaches the rather surprising conclusion that the GCC states hardly succeeded in forging a common front and in acting in concert. It has been brought out in the thesis how significant intra-GCC disagreements surfaced both in the political field as well as in the arenas of defence and internal security. In the economic field it has been pointed out that the progress realized by the GCC has to be regarded as highly unsatisfactory and that it fell far below the level which was initially anticipated. The reasons behind this phenomenon have been fully elaborated.

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P.V. Joshi

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