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## Arabian-Persian Gulfs: An Introduction to Iran and the Gulf States

Posted by [Scott Lucas](#) in [Middle East & Iran](#)



[Sean Foley](#) writes for Enduring America:

The news in recent weeks about the deployment of US soldiers and advanced weapons to Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reminds us of the central position of the Arab oil-producing monarchies in the Persian Gulf to international efforts to contain the Iranian nuclear program. Few states in the Middle East have closer links to the two chief actors in the dispute, Iran and the United States, or few would be more negatively affected if Washington attacked Tehran.

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The six Arab oil-producing monarchies in the Persian Gulf region — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — are known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (or GCC) and have the largest oil and gas deposits in the world. GCC nationals and governments own significant portions of US and European corporations, while Europeans and Americans have invested heavily in the Council's states. The US Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain, and the US military maintains a large presence in Qatar and Jebel Ali (UAE), the only port deep enough to berth an aircraft carrier in the Gulf. Finally, GCC states have bought billions of dollars worth of US and European advanced weapons and technology, including French nuclear reactors.

GCC ties with America and Europe in part reflect the history of tensions between the government of Shi'a and Persian-speaking Iran and the much smaller Arab and Sunni states of the GCC. Relations have been especially hampered by the 1979 Iranian revolution, the support of many GCC states for Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war, and the outbreak of sectarian violence in Iraq. Iran has also threatened to seize GCC territory and to radicalize Shia populations living in the GCC. GCC governments worry that Iran could use nuclear weapons to dominate the Middle East, seal off the chief avenue for transporting oil and gas outside the Gulf (the Straits of Hormuz), or destroy desalination plants in the GCC. These plants have accounted for as much as 50 percent of the water and electricity in some GCC states and are vulnerable to attack



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because they are large, utilize complicated machinery, and are built near coasts.

Nonetheless, senior GCC and Iranian officials frequently exchange official visits. Qatar has provided diplomatic support for Iran and its nuclear program at the United Nations and in the GCC. Oman cooperates with Iran in managing the Straits of Hormuz, while Qatar and Iran have jointly developed the North Gas Field, the largest field in the world. Dubai has a sizeable Iranian population and has run a highly profitable re-export trade with southern Iranian ports for decades. Iran has also become a strong market for GCC goods, especially those from the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Ultimately, the GCC states will be a key barometer of stability in the Middle East. If the GCC states publicly and consistently side with Washington against Iran, then war may be inevitable. But if the GCC states continue to quietly cooperate with Washington while publicly talking to Tehran, a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear dispute may be attainable.

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