

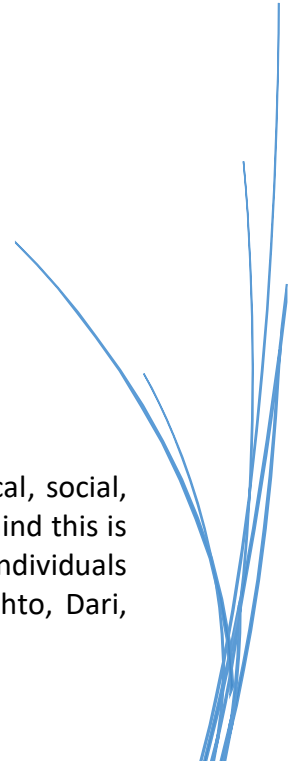
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

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THE PERSIAN GULF ARAB STATES IN RELATION TO A POTENTIAL U.S. AND ISRAELI ATTACK ON IRAN: ROLES, COSTS, AND FUTURE SCENARIOS



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



THE PERSIAN GULF ARAB STATES IN RELATION TO A POTENTIAL U.S. AND ISRAELI ATTACK ON IRAN: ROLES, COSTS, AND FUTURE SCENARIOS

Introduction

The confrontation between Iran and the U.S.–Israeli axis has turned the Persian Gulf into one of the most critical geopolitical regions in the world. The strategic importance of this region is particularly heightened by its central role in global energy supply and the presence of vital transit routes such as the Strait of Hormuz. Any disruption to these routes could generate consequences far beyond the region, potentially triggering severe crises in global energy markets and international trade.

Under such circumstances, the Persian Gulf states have emerged as key actors in the regional balance of power, adopting diverse approaches toward the ongoing crisis. Some states align closely with the United States and support its strategic objectives, while others seek to contain the scope of confrontation through balancing policies or mediatory diplomacy aimed at reducing regional escalation.

These differences in strategic positioning determine the level of vulnerability, the nature of potential damages, and the broader political, economic, and security consequences each state may face. Disruptions in energy exports, heightened security threats, and increased defense expenditures represent some of the most significant consequences for the region as a whole.

This situation has created considerable uncertainty regarding the future regional order and has highlighted the need to examine multiple possible scenarios, ranging from the continuation of the current fragile status quo to the emergence of new regional security arrangements.

Focusing on four main dimensions—geopolitical position, strategic role, potential costs, and future scenarios—this analysis seeks to provide a comprehensive and analytical understanding of the position of the Persian Gulf states within the evolving regional crisis.

THE GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF THE PERSIAN GULF IN THE WAR

Within the structure of the international system, the Persian Gulf is not merely a regional body of water; rather, it is one of the most vital geopolitical centers in the world. Its significance stems primarily from its indispensable role in ensuring global energy security, as a substantial share of the world's proven oil and gas reserves is concentrated in the countries surrounding it. Based on available data up to approximately 2025, Saudi Arabia holds the largest oil reserves in the Persian Gulf region with around 267 billion barrels, followed by Iran with 208 billion barrels, Iraq with 145 billion barrels, the United Arab Emirates with 113 billion barrels, Kuwait with 101 billion barrels, Qatar with 25 billion barrels, and Oman with



approximately 5 billion barrels. Together, these reserves amount to nearly 864 billion barrels, representing roughly 69 percent of the world's total proven oil reserves.

This enormous concentration of energy resources has made the Persian Gulf the beating heart of the global economy. Any disruption in the production or export of energy from this region would undoubtedly have direct consequences for global oil and gas prices, as well as for the stability of international markets. For this reason, the Gulf states are not merely regional actors; they are critical nodes in the global economic system, and their security or instability affects far beyond their own geographical boundaries.

At the center of this unique geography lies the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow but extraordinarily strategic waterway through which a significant portion of the world's oil exports passes. In the context of the current conflict, this strait has become a major geopolitical pressure point. Iran has repeatedly viewed it as a strategic lever in response to military threats, often signaling the possibility of disrupting or closing the passage in times of heightened tension. In response, the United States and its allies have maintained a strong military presence in the waters of the Persian Gulf in order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of energy supplies. As a result, the Strait of Hormuz has evolved from a simple transit route into a strategic arena of confrontation, where any escalation could quickly trigger a global energy crisis and potentially expand the scope of war.

It is also important to note that although the Gulf states share the same geographical space, they do not interpret their geopolitical position in the same way. Rather, each state views this geography through the lens of its own security interests and strategic priorities. Countries that have normalized relations with Israel—or are moving toward normalization—such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Jordan, continue to define their regional role within the framework of security partnerships with the United States. These states seek to use their geographical position as a platform for strengthening defense capabilities and deterrence, including hosting military bases and participating in joint defense arrangements.

On the other hand, armed non-state groups with significant political and military influence in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen form another strategic front that operates largely in coordination with and support of Iran, while opposing Israel and the United States. At the same time, countries such as Qatar and Oman have adopted a balancing approach: while maintaining defense cooperation agreements with the United States, they also seek to play mediatory roles aimed at reducing regional tensions.

This diversity of approaches demonstrates that geography alone does not determine state behavior. Rather, it is the way states interpret and use geography that shapes their strategic orientation and foreign policy choices.



However, the same geopolitical position that has provided enormous economic and political opportunities for the Gulf states has also become a major source of vulnerability during wartime. Hosting U.S. military bases, geographic proximity to Iran, the concentration of critical energy infrastructure along the Gulf coast, and heavy dependence on maritime exports have made these countries highly exposed to missile strikes, drone attacks, and maritime disruptions. Recent attacks on oil facilities and ports in several Gulf states have shown that even the most advanced defense systems cannot fully protect such infrastructure.

Therefore, the geography of the Persian Gulf functions like a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is a source of wealth, influence, and strategic importance; on the other hand, it is a source of constant threat and insecurity. This reality forces the countries of the region to continuously balance the benefits of their strategic location against the serious risks that come with it.

THE ROLE OF THE GULF STATES IN THE WAR

One of the most significant dimensions of the role played by the Persian Gulf states in the ongoing confrontation between Iran and the U.S.–Israeli axis relates to their hosting of American military bases. This factor has effectively made these countries part of the operational architecture of the conflict. States such as Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates host key U.S. military facilities that play important roles in support operations, intelligence gathering, logistics, and even potential air operations against Iran.

The Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar—the largest U.S. air base in the region and the headquarters of U.S. Central Command—serves as a major strategic hub. Likewise, Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates supports air operations and reconnaissance missions, while the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain plays a central role in controlling maritime security in the Gulf. In addition, multiple military facilities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia provide logistical and defensive support. These are clear examples of the deep military presence of the United States in the region.

However, the level of involvement among these states is not uniform. Some primarily provide infrastructure and access, while others may engage more actively in intelligence sharing and defense coordination. This variation reflects complex considerations such as domestic security concerns, regional political calculations, and fears of direct Iranian retaliation.

Based on these differences, the role of the Gulf states in this conflict can be divided into three main categories.

First is the security-military role, mainly played by countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. These states, relying on their strategic alliance with the United



States, have focused on strengthening their defense capabilities and participating in regional deterrence structures.

Second is the balancing role, more commonly associated with countries such as Qatar and Kuwait. These states seek to preserve their relations with both Washington and Tehran, attempting to avoid being drawn into a zero-sum confrontation between the two sides.

Third is the mediatory role, which is particularly evident in the foreign policy of Oman. By adopting a policy of active neutrality, Oman seeks to maintain diplomatic channels between the conflicting parties and prevent further regional escalation.

These differences have had a significant impact on Iran's strategic perception of each Gulf state. From Tehran's perspective, countries that actively host U.S. military bases and contribute—directly or indirectly—to American and Israeli operations against Iran are viewed as part of the opposing front. As a result, they become more vulnerable to direct or indirect retaliation.

At the same time, countries pursuing balancing or mediatory policies have not been entirely free from pressure. Nevertheless, in some cases, they have served as informal channels of communication between Iran and the West. This distinction in Iran's strategic outlook is important not only for understanding current military threats but also for anticipating the future political order of the region.

Indeed, once the war subsides, a new map of alliances, rivalries, and regional divisions may emerge in the Persian Gulf, shaped largely by how each state positioned itself during this critical period.

ECONOMIC AND SECURITY COSTS IMPOSED ON THE GULF STATES

The ongoing war between Iran and the U.S.–Israeli axis has placed significant pressure on the economies of the Persian Gulf states, whose economic structures are fundamentally dependent on oil and gas exports. Disruptions in vital transit routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, sharp fluctuations in global energy prices, and rising shipping and transportation costs have created serious economic instability across the region.

Even in periods when global energy prices rise, the actual revenues of Gulf states remain under pressure due to reduced export volumes, increased insurance and transportation expenses, and growing uncertainty in international markets. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as the region's principal energy exporters, have faced some of the most substantial economic risks. In addition, the recent conflict has intensified inflationary pressures, weakened market



confidence, disrupted investment flows, and created broader instability in the regional energy market.

Beyond the economic sphere, the war has also generated serious social and psychological consequences. Rising uncertainty, concerns over security, and the visible vulnerability of strategic infrastructure have contributed to collective anxiety, weakened public confidence, and growing social pessimism. Taken together, these developments represent not merely a temporary crisis but a long-term structural shock that could significantly affect the development trajectory and regional stability of the Gulf.

From a security perspective, the Gulf states have faced direct and unprecedented threats. Iranian missile and drone attacks have targeted critical infrastructure, including oil facilities, ports, and even urban centers. According to reports by Al Jazeera, during the first 41 days of the conflict, Iran launched more than 6,413 missiles and drones toward seven Arab states in the region.

Comparative Table of Iran's Attacks on Arab Countries (up to April 10, 2026)

Country	Number of Missiles	Number of Drones	Reported Human Casualties
United Arab Emirates	563+	2,256	13 killed, 224 injured
Kuwait	354 ballistic + 15cruise	845	Not reported
Saudi Arabia	104	916	Not reported
Bahrain	194	515	Not reported
Qatar	227	111	Not reported
Jordan	291	Unspecified	Not reported
Oman	—	19	Not reported

These figures suggest that countries hosting major U.S. military bases have borne the heaviest Iranian retaliation. States such as the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have faced the greatest security pressure, with key infrastructure potentially becoming direct targets of military operations. In contrast, Oman has remained relatively less exposed. Bahrain, Qatar, and Jordan occupy an intermediate position, facing considerable but comparatively lower levels of attack.

This variation reflects the degree of each country's involvement in military cooperation with the United States. The more prominent a country's role in hosting U.S. bases and providing logistical or strategic support, the greater its level of vulnerability. As a result, domestic security across these states has been directly affected, while public fear, social insecurity, and economic pressure have increased throughout the region.



Another major consequence of the war has been the weakening of the Persian Gulf's image as a stable and secure region for investment and international trade. Over the past decades, countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have worked to establish themselves as major global financial and commercial hubs. However, the continuation of conflict and repeated attacks on strategic infrastructure have seriously damaged this image.

This decline in investor confidence is likely to result in reduced foreign direct investment, rising economic risk premiums, and capital outflows from the region. In response, Gulf governments will almost certainly increase their defense and security expenditures. The acquisition of advanced air defense systems, deeper military cooperation with international partners, greater investment in cybersecurity, and stronger protection of critical infrastructure are expected to become central policy priorities in the coming years.

FUTURE SCENARIOS

Considering the current dynamics of the conflict between Iran and the U.S.–Israeli axis, several possible future scenarios can be envisioned for the Persian Gulf states. These scenarios differ in terms of political choices, security risks, and long-term regional consequences.

The first and perhaps the most sustainable scenario is active neutrality. Under this approach, the Gulf states would continue to focus on protecting their critical infrastructure while avoiding direct military involvement in the war. Their main objective would be to reduce tensions through diplomacy, mediation, and regional dialogue, while preventing the conflict from expanding further.

This strategy would likely reduce both human and economic costs. Although some Iranian attacks on energy facilities and airfields might still occur, most major infrastructure would remain intact, allowing for faster recovery and reconstruction. In addition, maintaining a defensive and balanced position would enable Gulf countries to reassess their relations with Iran after the war and potentially act as mediators or partners in regional reconstruction efforts.

From a geopolitical perspective, this scenario would also allow them to preserve a degree of strategic independence from pressure exerted by the United States and Israel, while avoiding becoming a permanent battlefield for regional rivalries.

The second scenario is limited participation. In this case, some Gulf states—under pressure from the United States and Israel—might allow broader use of their military bases or provide greater intelligence and logistical support without becoming directly involved in combat operations. In return, they could receive stronger security guarantees and access to advanced



defense technologies from the United States, particularly sophisticated air defense systems similar to those used by Israel.

However, the main risk of this scenario would be an increase in Iranian retaliatory attacks against energy infrastructure, ports, and water facilities across the Gulf. Such attacks could seriously disrupt oil and gas exports and create significant economic instability. Politically, limited participation could also damage the international image of these states, as cooperation with Israeli military operations against Iran might be viewed not as the defense of national sovereignty but as serving the strategic interests of Tel Aviv.

The third and least likely—yet most dangerous—scenario is direct military involvement. If Gulf states were to enter the war openly against Iran, they would likely face a prolonged and exhausting regional conflict with severe human and economic consequences.

Critical infrastructure such as oil and gas facilities, electricity networks, and water systems would become primary targets of large-scale Iranian attacks, leading to serious domestic instability. From a geopolitical perspective, this scenario would likely produce the greatest strategic advantage for Israel, as both Iran and the Gulf states would become deeply engaged in mutual confrontation, potentially allowing Israel to strengthen its position as the dominant regional power.

In contrast, the Gulf states would face major losses, including sharp declines in oil revenues, rising public debt, and growing social pressure caused by economic hardship and insecurity. Furthermore, such a scenario could weaken their relations with major Asian powers such as China and India, both of which depend heavily on stable energy imports from the Gulf and prioritize regional stability over prolonged military confrontation.

CONCLUSION

The Persian Gulf states find themselves in a complex and multi-layered position in the conflict between the U.S.–Israeli axis and Iran, where their strategic choices have the potential to significantly shape the future of the region. The continuation of a defensive posture, while less costly and more conducive to faster recovery and reconstruction, would still mean the persistence of uncertainty and ongoing economic pressure. It may reduce immediate military risks, but it does not fully eliminate long-term security concerns or regional instability.

In contrast, the scenario of limited participation in military operations could provide these states with stronger security guarantees and access to advanced defense technologies, particularly from the United States. However, such involvement would also increase the risk of Iranian retaliatory attacks against critical infrastructure and could damage the international



legitimacy of these countries by associating them too closely with Israeli strategic objectives rather than the defense of their own national sovereignty.

Ultimately, direct and active participation in the war represents the most dangerous and costly path. Such a scenario could lead to the destruction of vital Gulf infrastructure, including energy facilities, ports, and urban centers, while deepening both domestic instability and wider regional disorder. At the same time, this outcome would likely produce the greatest strategic advantage for Israel, as prolonged confrontation between Iran and the Gulf states could further consolidate Israeli regional dominance.

Overall, the future of the Persian Gulf will not be determined solely by military developments, but by the complex interaction of geopolitics, economic interdependence, and regional diplomacy. How these factors are managed will have far-reaching consequences not only for regional stability but also for the broader international order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Efforts should be made to establish a shared regional security framework involving both the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran, aimed at managing crises collectively and reducing excessive dependence on the United States.
2. To reduce tensions and build trust in the region, Iran should avoid targeting the national infrastructure of Arab Gulf states. At the same time, diplomatic discussions should be initiated regarding the non-use of Gulf territory for military operations against Iran.
3. Iran and the Arab Gulf states should expand cooperation through existing economic and cultural ties, strengthening regional stability and reducing the influence of external powers in regional affairs.
4. Rather than fully aligning with a single geopolitical axis, the Gulf states should prioritize balancing and mediatory policies to prevent the region from becoming a permanent arena for great-power competition.

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