

PERSPECTIVES

**THE GULF STATES AND IRAN:
ROBUST COMPETITORS OR INTERESTED
BYSTANDERS?**

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The Gulf states and Iran: robust competitors or interested bystanders?

Dr Rodger Shanahan

In the West, the current impasse over Iran's nuclear program has focused on the threat a weaponised capability poses to Israel, to the US-led political order in the energy-rich Gulf region and to broader proliferations risks. But little is heard about how the Gulf states themselves view Iran. Regional views are, by dint of circumstance, different from those held in Washington, London or Tel Aviv. The purpose of this paper is to understand how a complex mix of insecurity, economic interests, cultural ties and shared geography shape Gulf attitudes toward its large neighbour. This paper will also examine the dilemma facing the Gulf states in their relationship with Iran. Their inability to arrive at a common position regarding Iran means that responsibility for Iran policy is either left in the hands of individual Gulf states or falls to the United States. In the latter case, Gulf states worry that their interests may not be addressed in any resolution, peaceful or otherwise, of the Iranian nuclear issue. The paper will conclude by examining any signs of change in the way that Gulf states collectively or individually are likely to approach the Iran issue in the future.

Complex relations

Relations between Iran and its Gulf neighbours are invariably more complex than the often repeated claims of intractable Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shi'a rivalry allow. Ties across the Gulf reflect political and economic rivalries, deep ethnic and family linkages, significant investment and trade relations and, in particular, the reality of shared maritime boundaries. As Saudi King Fahd observed in 1989, 'We cannot change the geographic reality of Iran and Iran cannot change our geographic reality'.¹

¹ Henner Furtig, Conflict and cooperation in the Persian Gulf: the interregional order and US policy, *Middle East Journal*, vol 61, no 4, Fall 2007, p 630.

A key, historical source of tension in the Gulf region has been Iran's view of itself as the pre-eminent Gulf power. In contrast to its traditionally nomadic Arab neighbours, urbanised Iranians take pride in thousands of years of civilisation, of great poets, artists and builders. Shah Pahlavi spoke of Iran's 'Great Civilisation'² and through his close ties with the United States sought to establish a regional security role commensurate with his notions of Iranian greatness.³ The Iranian revolution in 1979 supplanted the Shah's pro-Western regional leadership ambitions with a more radical form of 'Iranian exceptionalism' where pre-revolutionary ideals of cultural superiority were mixed with a post-revolutionary belief in the divine nature of Iran's destiny. Flushed with the success of creating the first Shi'a Islamic government in history, elements of Iran's revolutionary apparatus encouraged Islamist groups plotting to overthrow Sunni governments in Arab Gulf states.⁴ During the Iran-Iraq War, some Gulf states' support for Iraq brought them into direct conflict with Iran.⁵

After the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian government followed a more conciliatory policy with its neighbours, mindful of the need to restore regional ties as it sought to rebuild its shattered economy. First under President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani and then later under President Muhammad Khatami, Iran sought better relations with its neighbours. The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 helped particularly in re-engaging with Saudi Arabia.⁶ Symbolic moments such as Shi'a Iran's hosting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in Tehran in 1997 and the launch of a number of confidence-building measures with its regional rival Saudi Arabia gave hope that Iran was becoming a cooperative member of the region.⁷

With the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, a less conciliatory approach resurfaced. His election coincided with a number of events that further raised Gulf concerns about Iranian ambitions; in particular the US invasion of Iraq, which

² Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The life and times of the Shah*, University of California Press, 2009, p 332.

³ The Shah sent a brigade of troops to support the Sultan of Oman during the Dhofar rebellion in the 1970s. Until the revolution it also maintained 1,000 troops in the country as well as radar and fighter aircraft.

⁴ Tehran hosted Shi'a movements such as the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the Saudi Organisation of the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula. Accusations of Iranian involvement in the December 1983 bombings in Kuwait of the US and French embassies, oil and infrastructure targets furthered Gulf states' fears that Iran sought to destabilise their governments.

⁵ Kuwait was considered a legitimate target for its export of Iraqi oil and Iran conducted bombing raids against it in 1980 and 1981. Following Iraqi attacks on Iranian oil export facilities, Iran began attacking Kuwaiti, and later Saudi, tankers from May 1984.

⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini had called for the overthrow of the Saudi ruling family following the deaths of hundreds of Iranians during the 1987 *hajj*.

⁷ *Iran and its strategic role in the Gulf*, Baker Institute Study No.7, Rice University, June 1998, p 2.

quickly became an opportunity for Iran to extend its influence in the region, and revelations about the advancing state of Iran's nuclear program. Outside the Gulf, Iran has continued to support Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and has sought to position itself as an Islamic leader supporting Arab nationalist resistance movements, in an attempt to undermine the influence of the major Sunni Arab status quo powers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. All of these factors have heightened Gulf Arab sensitivities, without actually promoting a more coordinated or effective response from these states to the Iranian challenge.

At the same time there remains a long history of border disputes and irredentist claims between Iran and Gulf countries. The issue of Bahraini sovereignty has been an issue for decades.⁸ The issue flared in recent years with public calls for Bahrain's reunification with Iran in 2007 by Husayn Shariatmadari (an adviser to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei) and in 2009 by the former interior minister and adviser to the Supreme Leader, Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri. Both controversies were swiftly managed by reassurances to the contrary from official Iranian spokesmen and visits from high-ranking Iranian officials to Bahrain. A long-running dispute between the UAE and Iran also exists over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands. Strategically situated astride the Strait of Hormuz, and with significant oil reserves within their territorial waters, the Shah's forces occupied the islands the day before the UAE became independent in 1971. Since 1996 the UAE has sought to bring the issue for adjudication to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).⁹ Kuwait is also yet to fix its maritime boundary with Iran which has given rise to a dispute over the shared Arash/Durra offshore gas field.

It would be wrong, however, to characterise the Gulf states' relations with Iran as purely confrontational. Large numbers of Qataris, Bahrainis, Kuwaitis and Emiratis have ethnic Persian roots and these ties have often times been expressed in commercial links across the Gulf. Countries such as the UAE, and to a lesser extent Oman, make good use of their proximity to Iran and their links to the country to engage in significant trade and investment relationships. Dubai in particular has been a magnet for Iranian investment given its proximity to Iran, historical linkages and relatively free investment climate. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians reside in Dubai, billions of dollars of Iranian funds are invested there, thousands of Iranian

⁸ Iran's claims are based on post-Portuguese Persian sovereignty from 1622-1783. Iran declared Bahrain to be its 14th province in 1957 but the Shah recognized Bahraini independence in 1970.

⁹ Anthony Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia enters the twenty-first century*, Praeger, USA, 2003, p 83.

companies operate there and seven Iranian universities teach there.¹⁰ Little wonder then that, even as Tehran has become increasingly isolated politically, bilateral trade has increased. Between 2000 and 2007, GCC-Iran trade increased fivefold, of which the UAE accounted for 70 per cent.¹¹

Iran's reserves of natural gas (the world's second-largest) have also made it an attractive partner for increasingly electricity-poor Gulf states and resulted in the forging of significant economic ties with Gulf states that require guaranteed gas supplies. Kuwait, which suffered Iranian attacks on its shipping during the Iran-Iraq war, signed a preliminary Memorandum of Understanding regarding gas imports from Iran in March 2005 (though there has been little progress on the issue since then). Cooperation on gas has also been an opportunity for Iran to forge closer ties with Qatar (the holder of the world's third-largest gas reserves) with whom it shares a major gas field. Likewise, in April 2008 an agreement was struck between Oman and Iran to jointly develop Iran's Kish offshore natural gas field at a cost of some \$12 billion.¹²

Gulf diplomacy and strategy toward Iran

The Gulf states have sought to manage their relations with Iran in three ways: collectively, via the Gulf Cooperation Council; bilaterally; and indirectly through their security relationship with the United States. The formation of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (known as the Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC) in 1981 was a reaction to the threat posed to the region as a result of the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraq war. Yet at no time in its history has the GCC ever really developed an effective common diplomatic position on Iran. Indeed, despite its origins, the organisation has for the most part focused on strengthening economic relations between member states (though not all that effectively). On Iran and other security issues, the GCC has limited itself to bland and ambiguous statements of mutual concern, for example over the nuclear issue or existing territorial disputes. Typical of the public approach of the GCC was the communiqué issued following the 112th GCC Foreign Minister's meeting in

¹⁰ Jonathan Thomas, *The dynamics of globalisation and the uncertain future of Iran: an examination of Iranians in Dubai*, *al-Nakhlah*, Fletcher School, Tufts University, USA, Fall 2006 p 5.

¹¹ *Middle East Times*, 24 November 2008.

¹² <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Iran/NaturalGas.html>.

September 2009 stating that ‘All countries of the region should be committed to the principles of good neighbourliness and the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of each other.’¹³

In part the GCC has been hampered by Iran’s understandable refusal to deal with an organisation ostensibly established as a counter to its regional ambitions. As a former Iranian ambassador to the UN noted of Tehran’s views of the Council in its early days, ‘The GCC was not seen as favourable to Iran. It was an Arab and not a cross-cultural regional entity.’¹⁴ But a more significant factor in the GCC’s inability to strike a common position relates to the diverse national stances held by member states on Iran. Individual states have, by and large, sought to manage their political and economic relations with Tehran bilaterally. This also reflects the fact that intra-Gulf Arab relations contain their own tensions. Saudi-Qatari relations are occasionally testy, ranging from border disputes to the actions of al-Jazeera through to a feeling that Qatar has sought to pursue a leading regional diplomatic role traditionally the preserve of Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Kuwait and Bahrain enjoy close relations with Saudi Arabia, due in part to Kuwaiti gratitude for Saudi support extended to the al-Sabah family following the Iraqi invasion and because of Saudi Arabia’s generous provision of oil to Bahrain both *gratis* and at concessional rates. While the UAE has a disagreement with Riyadh over its western border, it has close relations with the Sultanate of Oman, some of whose territory lies within the UAE’s national borders.

The approach of individual Gulf states to Iran often stands in contrast to Western approaches, reflecting different political and cultural outlooks. This was illustrated by the relative reactions to the 2009 Presidential election in Iran. In contrast to the US and European reaction, that emphasised claims of electoral fraud, the Gulf states struck a pragmatic tone. The Emir of Kuwait and the King of Bahrain sent congratulatory messages to Ahmadinejad. Even the UAE, the Gulf state with the longest standing and seemingly most intractable territorial dispute with the Islamic republic, chose to accept the result with the Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin

¹³ GCC Ministers call for cementing relations with Iran, *Arab News*, 3 September 2009: <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=126029&d=3&m=9&y=2009>.

¹⁴ Christin Marschall, *Iran’s Persian Gulf policy*, Routledge, London, 2003, p 73.

Zayid al-Nahyan asserting that 'What's happening in Iran is an internal issue and falls under the Iranian government's responsibility.'¹⁵

Although Iranian political outcomes ultimately affect the region, Gulf states have ostensibly adopted a policy of non-interference in these matters. With the current tensions in the relationship, there is the added incentive of seeking to avoid antagonising a government that is still in full control of the security organs of the country. Autocratic rulers also know better than to pass judgement on other countries' electoral processes, regardless of how flawed they may be. The willingness of the Gulf states to adopt a business-as-usual approach was illustrated by the visit of the Sultan of Oman soon after the election, the first head of state to visit the new government and the first time the Sultan had visited Iran in his more than 30 years in power.

The nuclear issue

On the issue that has come to dominate discussion of Iran internationally, its nuclear program, both bilaterally and collectively Gulf states have largely failed to play any significant role. Initiatives in support of international efforts on the Iranian nuclear program have been extremely limited. A Saudi Arabian invitation to join a GCC proposal for a regional enrichment capability in a neutral third country, a variation on an earlier Russian proposal,¹⁶ was rejected by Iran two days after it was raised. Saudi Arabia has held talks with President Ahmadenijad and also on occasion reportedly acted as an intermediary between the Supreme Leader's office and the United States.¹⁷ This policy 'paralysis' contrasts with initiatives on the Palestinian issue, most notably the Saudi Arabian Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, developed and championed by the then-Crown Prince and now King Abdullah. Since its tabling at the Arab League summit in Beirut it has remained a 'live' policy initiative and one widely supported in the Arab world.

The inability of Gulf states to present a unified front on the issue and the willingness of some states to view the issue through their own self-interested prism were also on display when Qatar,

¹⁵ UAE says Iran protests "internal issue", opposes interference, *Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 2009: <http://online.wsj.com/article/BT-CO-20090622-704818.html>.

¹⁶ George Perkovitch, Nuclear developments in the GCC: risks and trends, *Gulf Yearbook 2007-2008*, Gulf Research Centre, Dubai, May 2008, p 231.

¹⁷ Thomas R. Mattair, Mutual threat perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC perception', *Middle East Policy*, vol XIV, no.2, Summer 2007, p 138.

during its time as the Arab representative on the UN Security Council in 2006-07, provided the sole dissenting voice in the July 2006 UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1696 that called on Iran to ‘..suspend all enrichment related and reprocessing activities, including research and development’. Qatar’s UN Ambassador stated that his negative vote reflected an unwillingness to condemn Iran at the same time that Israel was fighting Hizbullah during the 2006 war and also that he wished to accede to Iran’s request to seek more time.¹⁸ Qatar did, however, later vote for the December 2006 UNSCR 1737 that imposed sanctions on nuclear-proliferation sensitive activities in Iran.¹⁹ Even if the vote reflected Qatar’s own national agenda, it illustrates the difficulty the region has in sending an unambiguous message to Iran on the nuclear and other issues.

There are also practical reasons why individual Gulf states face difficulty joining collective Gulf or even international action on Iran. In particular, Dubai in the UAE is a key business centre for Iran, reflecting its proximity and the number of Iranian expatriates residing and companies operating there, particularly in the banking sector. In a purely commercial sense, Iran is a much more important export market for the UAE than is the US. In 2007, UAE exports to the US were \$1.27 billion compared to exports to Iran of \$4.7 billion.²⁰ Despite this, the UAE has assisted in tightening the sanctions regime by limiting the issuing of business licences to Iranian nationals, but has stopped short of following the leads of the US, EU and UK in closing branches of Iranian banks listed for US sanctions. In the UAE, Iranian banks such as Melli and Saderat are considered local companies because they are 51 per cent UAE-owned. Oman has also adopted a pragmatic approach to sanctions, acknowledging the central role that smuggling between its northern reaches in the Mussandam Peninsula plays in the lives of the population there and the practical costs of policing it even if they saw it necessary to do so. Maintaining close trade and investment relations with neighbours like Iran is essential for the economic health of the Sultanate who, unlike the other Gulf states, lack the oil or natural gas reserves to sustain their economy over the long term.

¹⁸ UN Security Council demands that Iran suspend nuclear activities:
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=19353&Cr=iran&Cr1=>

¹⁹ Michael Spies, UN Security Council escalates nuclear situation with Iran, *The Lawyers’ Committee on Nuclear Policy*, 10 January 2007: <http://lcnp.org/disarmament/iran/UNSCres-dec06.htm>.

²⁰ Nader Habibi & Eckart Woertz, *US-Arab economic relations and the Obama Administration*, Crown Centre for Middle East Studies, Middle East Brief No 34, February 2009, p 6.

A key consequence of this inability to strike a common position on the nuclear question (and other issues) is that GCC states have largely ceded policy leadership to the United States and the Europeans. This has had drawbacks for Gulf Arab states, reflected in their nervousness about the consequences of almost any Western-led solution. On the one hand, the 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion that Iran had ceased nuclear weapons development in 2003 made some Gulf states nervous that Washington's political will toward stymieing Iranian nuclear efforts was waning. On the other hand, there has been a constant fear that Iran would trade its nuclear program in exchange for some form of Western recognition of it as a regional hegemon. This nervousness was illustrated by the fact that at least some of the GCC states saw fit to seek assurances in December 2008 from the five permanent members of the UN security Council and Germany (the so-called P5+1) that any Security Council policy regarding Iran's nuclear capability '...should not undermine the GCC states' security, stability and national interest.'²¹

There is also a concern that any military confrontation between the US and Iran would see Gulf countries targeted in any Iranian retaliation, reflecting a broader question for the Gulf States about the consequences of their security relationship with the United States. Having shown themselves either unwilling or incapable of establishing a robust multilateral, indigenous regional security architecture (the Peninsula Shield Force being a good example of symbolism triumphing over substance), Gulf Arab states have sought their security through close bilateral security links with the United States, reflected in the establishment of large bases in all of the Gulf countries with the exception of Saudi Arabia. For the Arab states, though, any Gulf security architecture that excludes Iran is seen by Tehran as an anti-Iranian alliance, further complicating Gulf-Iranian relations. The presence of US bases in the region is anathema to Iran because of its perception of them as a threat to Tehran's security and because the capabilities they bring constrains Tehran's military freedom of action in the region. Despite President Ahamdenijad's call for a regional security alliance (that naturally excludes the United States), there is no indication that any of the Gulf states have seriously considered swapping US security guarantees for an Iranian-brokered alliance.

²¹ Nicole Stracke, *GCC and the challenge of US-Iran negotiations*, Gulf Research Centre, 5 March 2009.

Signs of a change?

In contrast to this *laissez faire* approach on the part of the Gulf states, there have been some signs of late of a more assertive role by some Gulf states in responding to the Iranian challenge. In particular, Saudi-Iranian rivalry has resurfaced as a feature of regional relations. Riyadh has steadfastly refused to send diplomatic representation to what it sees as a pro-Iranian, Shi'a-governed Iraq and it has also been a generous supporter of both the government of Fouad Siniora and subsequently Sa'ad Hariri's Future Movement in order to blunt the political aspirations of Hizbullah in Lebanon. It has also sought to distance Syria from its Iranian ally through diplomatic engagement, most recently through King Abdullah's October visit to Damascus, an about-turn on its policy of isolation of the Ba'athist state following Syria's alleged involvement in the 2005 assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister and Saudi citizen Rafiq Hariri.

In terms of collective action, in December 2006 the GCC announced that it would seek to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes, ostensibly to meet future power needs as part of a GCC-wide initiative. Whilst a number of GCC states have genuine and quite pressing electricity generation problems, the timing of the announcement raised suspicions that the GCC were also sending a message to Iran. As with so many of the GCC's multilateral initiatives, however, the prospect of a GCC-wide nuclear program seems slim. Individual states are pursuing the effort at different paces. The UAE signed an Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (the so-called 123 Agreement) with the United States in 2009, the year after Bahrain and Saudi Arabia signed MOUs with the US on Nuclear Energy Cooperation. Both the UAE and Bahrain have said that they will buy their reactor fuel overseas and forego the enrichment cycle, thereby eliminating suspicions about their motives. Kuwait has established a nuclear energy commission and also commissioned a French firm to study its requirements for nuclear power.

Whilst there is almost no prospect that the smaller GCC states would seek to develop a nuclear weapon, a bigger question mark exists about Saudi intentions, particularly should the Iranians one day declare or even imply that they possess a weapons capability. While Saudi Arabia has reportedly approved the construction of a pilot nuclear power plant, there is no indication of any intent to pursue a weapon through an indigenous effort. Most of the 'evidence' for Saudi proliferation intentions appear to rest on its purchase of Chinese-made CSS-2 intermediate

ballistic missiles in the mid 1980s, its financial resources and close relationship with Pakistan that could allow it to acquire a capability without having to develop it. Such claims oversimplify the ability of a country to develop even an ‘off-the-shelf’ deliverable nuclear capability, as well as the political costs of opting out of the non-proliferation treaty which it signed in 1988.

Speculation about Saudi proliferation intentions, though, shows the belief that in the event of a publicly declared Iranian nuclear capability, Saudi national pride and regional security calculations could not allow it to sit idly by. What that would mean for the region is unclear. Smaller Gulf states would be caught between two nuclear-armed regional powers both of whom sought regional hegemony, the US-Saudi security relationship would come under enormous strain because of Riyadh’s decision to become a nuclear proliferator, and the willingness of the smaller Gulf states to continue to seek their security guarantees from the United States would be called into question. This may go some way to explaining why reports have emerged of the UAE and Kuwait seeking to use their financial and economic clout in an attempt to quietly support a more robust sanctions regime by offering incentives to Russia and China, in the form of arms purchases and debt rescheduling in the case of the former, and a million work visas and oil exploration leases in the case of the latter.²²

Interested bystanders or willing participants ?

The relationship between the Islamic Republic and the Gulf states individually, and collectively via the GCC, is a complex one. To begin with, Iran sees the GCC as an exclusionary organisation which has consequently coloured Tehran’s view of it. In dealing with a neighbour with whom it differs in terms of religion, governance, language and culture, but with whom its members share deep historical and commercial links, the GCC has found it difficult to present a united front.

The Gulf states find themselves in a difficult position regarding their relations with Iran, partially of their own making, but also because the prism through which they view the issue differs markedly from that of the United States. The countries do not have the luxury of geographic

²² Gulf states pitch in to help break Iran nuclear impasse, September 25 2009:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/23/nuclear-iran-un-gcc-sanctions>.

separation to insulate them from Iranian nuclear ambitions nor from the consequences of any strike against the country to curtail those ambitions. Some GCC states have experienced at first hand the results of military confrontation with Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. While for the most part they are suspicious of Iran's regional intentions and, in the case of Saudi Arabia, view Tehran as a regional competitor, they have no wish to confront Iran needlessly or without a reasonable understanding of the outcome of doing so.

Allied to this is the states' natural proclivity for quiet diplomacy and dialogue as a means of addressing issues. This is sometimes construed as inactivity on the part of the Gulf states, a criticism that has often been appropriate in the case of policy towards Iran. As IAEA chief Mohammed al Baradei observed in March 2009, he found it '...surprising that the Arab countries are not engaged in dialogue between Iran and the West. The neighbours have so far been sitting on the fence. Any solution to the Iranian issue has to engage the neighbours.'²³ This proclivity for quiescence may be suitable for regional issues, but when the issue is an international one then the lack of coherent policy approaches leaves the field open to external actors setting agendas with all the resultant difficulties this imposes on the Gulf states. It is doubly difficult for the Gulf states given their reliance on US security guarantees the cost of which, basing rights for US forces, makes them a potential target for Iran in the event of a regional conflict.

Bilaterally, individual GCC states have been and continue to be active. As the regional heavyweight and with the most to lose in the case of increased Iranian influence, Saudi Arabia has sought to use its financial and diplomatic resources to blunt Iranian influence in Lebanon through support for pro-government Sunni political forces, by attempting to dislocate Iran from its Syrian ally and possibly by engaging in its own ambiguous game of nuclear development. If reports are to be believed then the UAE and Kuwait are also seeking to utilise economic incentives to encourage others to support increased sanctions against Iran while maintaining large (and historical) trading links with Tehran themselves.

Collectively, however, the GCC is structurally unsuited to addressing issues such as Iran's nuclear program, which means that individual countries' attitudes to Iran hold sway. The default option for most individual Gulf states in dealing with Iran is to do nothing other than encourage

²³ Tariq Khaitous, *Arab reactions to a nuclear-armed Iran*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus No 94, June 2009, p 20.

dialogue. Their geographic realities encourage it, for the most part military capabilities make it prudent, and commercial considerations encourage it. As Abdallah Bishara, a former Secretary-General of the GCC said, ‘The status quo is the essence of the GCC’.²⁴ Unfortunately for the Gulf states, the United State’s national interests in the region and the US military presence in their countries have meant that unless they take a more active role in the Iran nuclear issue they will be observers to or victims of, rather than participants in, any resolution of the issues.

²⁴ Marschall, *Iran’s Persian Gulf policy*.

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