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The Arab Gulf States, the Iran Conflict, and U.S. Relations: In Brief

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Since February 2026, U.S./Israel-Iran conflict in the Persian Gulf region and the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz to most shipping have presented fundamental risks to the security and economic vitality of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Thousands of attacks on facilities hosting U.S. forces and critical infrastructure locations across the GCC countries during this period have demonstrated the Arab Gulf states’ vulnerability to threats from neighboring Iran and Iran-aligned regional armed groups. GCC member state responses to the 2026 conflict have differed, while each state has condemned attacks on its respective territory. The UAE, having faced the most attacks of any GCC state, has adopted a defiant and forceful posture toward Iran. Saudi Arabia has called for de-escalation and has promoted Pakistan-based peace talks, while asserting its right to self-defense. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE reportedly have conducted strikes on Iran, the UAE reportedly has welcomed direct Israeli defense aid, and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reportedly have struck Iran-linked targets in Iraq. Other GCC states have thwarted attacks, Qatar and Oman have promoted diplomatic engagement, and Qatar has hosted Iranian officials for mediation talks.

Iran’s attacks and the course of the wider conflict may be raising pivotal questions in the Gulf about U.S. security commitments to the Gulf states and future U.S.-GCC security partnership. The conflict has underscored an important reality for the GCC: the success of the Gulf states’ strategies to diversify their economies and become globally integrated commercial hubs remains dependent on the stability of the Persian Gulf region. Whether Iran emerges from the current conflict cowed and contained, emboldened and empowered, or undone, the Gulf states will face consequences. In the future, the GCC states may deepen their ties with the United States, pursue alternative partnerships with other states and adjust their approaches to Iran based on new views of their interests, or adopt a mix of approaches.

U.S. policies and Gulf state choices may affect U.S. security, diplomatic, and economic interests in the Gulf region and beyond. Congress may examine whether or how the conflict will shape U.S. basing and force posture plans and Gulf country support for the hosting of U.S. forces or the use of their territory, waters, and airspace for U.S. operations. Congress may be asked to consider new arms sales to Gulf countries and may evaluate the implications of any Gulf country decisions to diversify sources of defense imports or expand local production of defense technologies. Congress may also assess the Gulf states’ responses to U.S. requests that they recognize and normalize their relationships with Israel in connection with any U.S. negotiated agreement with Iran. The Gulf states may evaluate any U.S.-Iran agreement relative to their security interests, views on nuclear issues, and an agreement’s effects on maritime transit in the Strait of Hormuz. Congress may evaluate the implications of any resulting accord or divisions between the GCC states, any new or expanded partnerships among the Gulf States, or any new initiatives between them and extra-regional actors, including Russia, the People’s Republic of China, and countries in South Asia, Africa, East Asia, and Europe.

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Background and Pre-Conflict Dynamics

Through early 2026, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain) had sought to avoid direct military confrontation in the Persian Gulf region, amid longstanding concerns about Iran's nuclear program, missile and drone capabilities, and partnerships with nonstate armed groups.¹ Years of attacks by the Yemen-based, Iran-backed Ansarallah (aka Houthi) movement on Saudi Arabia, attacks on Saudi energy sites in 2019 attributed to Iran and Iran-backed groups, and Houthi attacks on the UAE in 2022 illustrated threats to GCC territory and infrastructure posed by Iran and its partners. Reflecting on the Biden Administration's policies toward Iran and the region and their own security and economic priorities, the GCC states pursued a conditional reengagement with Iran, culminating in the April 2023 Iraq- and People's Republic of China-facilitated reopening of Saudi-Iranian diplomatic ties and followed by GCC-Iran visits that broadened cross-Gulf dialogue but did not resolve core GCC-Iran differences.

The Hamas-led attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, and subsequent Israeli and U.S. strikes against Iranian proxies and Iran directly (in April 2024, October 2024, March and April 2025, and summer 2025) created policy dilemmas for the GCC. On the one hand, GCC states may have tacitly welcomed the strikes' effects, which degraded the capabilities of Iran and Iran-backed groups, such as Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iraqi armed groups, and the Houthis.² On the other hand, direct Israeli and U.S. attacks on Iran raised the risk of more assertive Iranian responses, including attacks, demands, and threats that risked upending the GCC's engagement strategy, partnership with the United States, and economic transformation initiatives.³ Iran's limited attack on Qatar following U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear sites in June 2025 made those threats tangible.

Amidst the January 2026 unrest in Iran, when President Donald Trump reportedly had been considering military intervention on behalf of Iranian protestors, GCC states reportedly advocated against the use of force, fearing Iranian retaliatory strikes against them.⁴ According to press accounts, before the war, some GCC members denied the United States use of their airspace for offensive operations against Iran, presumably based on fears of retaliation.⁵

Conflict Effects and Gulf Responses

As of late-May 2026, the Iran conflict has profoundly affected the GCC. Iran's decision to retaliate militarily against GCC member states through direct strikes and its de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted GCC economies, tarnishing the Gulf states' images as reliable sources for global energy, as secure partners for diversified investment, and as attractive destinations for foreign high-skilled labor and international tourism. Iran's attacks—even after weeks of punishing U.S. and Israeli strikes—have exposed the region's key vulnerabilities. Though U.S. officials report Iranian capacity has been much degraded, Iranian drones and short-

¹ For example, see David D. Kirkpatrick, "Saudi Arabia Charges Iran with 'Act of War,' Raising Threat of Military Clash," *New York Times*, November 6, 2017; and Reuters, "UAE's Newly Elected Ruler Sees Iran, Islamists as Threat to Gulf Safe Haven," May 14, 2022.

² "Gulf Nations Quietly Applauding Israel, but Fear Iran Strikes Could Destabilize Region," *Times of Israel*, June 13, 2025.

³ "In Attacking Iran, Israel Further Alienates Would-Be Arab Allies," *New York Times*, June 18, 2025.

⁴ "Allies' Pleas, Limits of U.S. Power Held Off Iran Strike," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2026.

⁵ Rogue Ruiz et al., "The U.S. Military Hardware Pouring into the Middle East," *Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2026.

range missiles pose enduring risks to Gulf infrastructure, civilian targets, and military bases used by U.S. forces.⁶

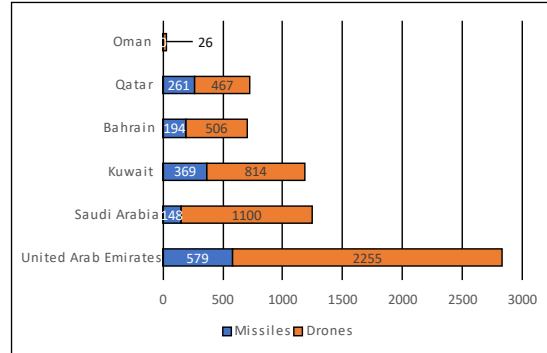
Iranian Drone and Missile Attacks against Gulf Infrastructure

Immediately following the launch of Operation Epic Fury/Roaring Lion on February 28, 2026, Iran struck all the GCC states with drones and missiles. Between February 28 and May 17, Iran fired more than 6,700 drones and missiles at the GCC states (Figure 1), in addition to those fired at other states hosting U.S. forces. This includes Iranian attacks that followed the declaration of a U.S.-Iran ceasefire on April 8.

Iranian attacks and the debris from interceptions caused damage, school closures, air space disruptions, and affected tourism and real estate markets across the GCC.

Damage to the GCC’s oil and gas sectors and key industrial sites (see below) has been significant. On May 17, Iran launched three drones at the UAE, one of which hit an electrical generator outside the inner perimeter of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant. Iran also targeted desalination facilities in Bahrain and Kuwait following an Israeli attack on an Iranian desalination plant. As of May 20, approximately 28 non-U.S. nationals reportedly had been killed in all six GCC states either from Iranian fire or from military activities relating to the war.⁷ Nearly half of all Iranian attacks on the Gulf states have been directed at the UAE (Figure 1). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have reported attacks on their territory originating in Iraq, alleged to have been carried out by Iran-backed groups.⁸ The vast majority of attacks on Gulf populations and key infrastructure have been intercepted by missile defense systems, such as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), Patriot batteries, other military platforms, and at least one Iron Dome battery operated by Israeli soldiers in the UAE.⁹ U.S. military officials credit improved integration of U.S. and Gulf defense networks for countering Iran’s high-volume attacks.¹⁰

Figure 1. Iranian Missile and Drone Attacks as of May 17, 2026



Source: CRS, using Gulf Research Center data, May 17, 2026.

Internal Unrest and Iranian Subversion

The Arab Gulf states have long cracked down against any internal dissent and, as GCC states have come under Iranian fire, authorities have sharpened their response toward any act that could

⁶ Admiral Charles Cooper, Commander, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Statement for the Record, Senate Committee on Armed Services, May 14, 2026.

⁷ “US-Israel Attacks on Iran: Death Toll and Injuries Live Tracker,” Al Jazeera, accessed May 27, 2026.

⁸ “Kuwait Summons Iranian ambassador, Protests over Missile, Drone Attacks,” *The Times* (Kuwait), March 9, 2026; “GCC condemns drone attack on Saudi Arabia launched from Iraqi airspace,” *The National*, May 18, 2026.

⁹ Mark Cancian and Chis Park, “Assessing the Air Campaign After Three Weeks: Iran War by the Numbers,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 25, 2026; Francesco Salesio Schiavi, “Beyond the U.S. Umbrella: Gulf States and the Diversification of Air Defense After Iran,” Arab Gulf States Institute, April 28, 2026; and “Israel Sent Iron Dome Air Defense Systems to UAE, US Envoy Says,” Reuters, May 12, 2026.

¹⁰ Admiral Charles Cooper, Commander, U.S. CENTCOM, Statement for the Record, Senate Committee on Armed Services, May 14, 2026.

be construed as pro-Iranian.¹¹ While Iran's attacks in some cases have heightened nationalism and collective self-defense throughout the GCC, in certain countries with sizeable Shia Arab populations and/or residents of Iranian origin, police apparently have stepped up their monitoring of the population. For example, in Bahrain, which has an Arab Shia majority and experienced a popular uprising between 2011 and 2014, courts have convicted several citizens for various crimes since the outbreak of the conflict, such as supporting Iran, filming in prohibited locations, disseminating banned statements, and sabotage.¹² Under its legal system, Bahrain has revoked the citizenship of dozens of individuals charged with posting online pro-Iranian sentiment.¹³ One known Bahraini dissident, who had served over a decade of jail time for his role in the 2011 uprising, died in custody after having been rearrested during the early days of the war; according to human rights organizations, his body showed evidence of having been tortured.¹⁴ Perhaps as a sign that authorities have grown more sensitive to public backlash against violent state repression and international opinion, Bahrain investigated and charged an intelligence officer with beating the detainee to death—the prosecution was a rare occurrence in the monarchy.¹⁵

Iran allegedly has tried to foment unrest inside the GCC. According to press accounts, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) may activate sleeper cells in GCC states.¹⁶ Authorities have increased their monitoring of foreign nationals suspected of acting as Iranian or Hezbollah agents and in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, have arrested individuals suspected of conducting espionage for Iran.¹⁷ GCC states also reportedly have said that Iranian proxy groups in Iraq and Lebanon have attempted to carry out attacks. In Kuwait, authorities reportedly have claimed that several IRGC personnel were arrested attempting to infiltrate Kuwait's Bubiyan Island.¹⁸

Economic Disruption and Fiscal Effects

As of late May 2026, observers have noted both the unprecedented level of economic disruption in the Gulf and the resilience and effectiveness of Gulf state responses to date, while warning that continued conflict and uncertainty would pose compounding difficulties.¹⁹ Prior to the conflict, the Gulf states were engaged in various economic and fiscal reform initiatives intended to expand non-energy-export-dependent sources of revenue, employment, and economic growth, but variations in their underlying material and financial resources and progress in their efforts meant that they were differently prepared to weather the conflict's negative effects. Pre-conflict per-barrel fiscal "break even" oil prices have remained stubbornly high in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.²⁰ Revenue from energy and petrochemical exports and energy intensive industrial products like aluminum have remained central to the Gulf state economies.

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Gulf States: More Than 1,000 Arrested in Sweeping War-Related Crackdown on Expression," June 1, 2026.

¹² "Bahrain Sentences Three to Life on Charges of Collaborating with Iran," Agence France Presse, May 12, 2026.

¹³ "US Middle East Ally Strips Citizenship from 69 in Crackdown on Pro-Iran Support," Fox News, April 28, 2026.

¹⁴ "Bahrain: Sayed Mohamed Almosawi Dies in Custody," Human Rights Watch, April 12, 2026.

¹⁵ "Bahrain Charges Officer After Prisoner Dies in Custody," Agence France Presse, April 16, 2026.

¹⁶ "UAE Adds 21 Lebanese People, Entities to 'Terror' List," Agence France Presse, May 13, 2026.

¹⁷ "Gulf Countries Warn of Rising Threat from Iran-Backed Militias and Proxies," *The Guardian* (UK), March 28, 2026.

¹⁸ "Kuwait Accuses Iran of Trying to Infiltrate Its Territory," *New York Times*, May 12, 2026.

¹⁹ For example, "A Prolonged Iran Crisis Could Irreversibly Damage Gulf States," *The Economist*, May 12, 2026.

²⁰ Hagar Omran, "Low Oil Prices and GCC Budgets in FY 2025: What's the Impact?" *Forbes Middle East*, April 21, 2025.

Iranian strikes have amplified Gulf state concerns about the security of centralized, sophisticated, and vulnerable energy, petrochemical, and water desalination infrastructure. According to energy analysts at *Welligence*, Iran's attacks against Gulf countries through early April 2026 destroyed oil and gas infrastructure valued at more than \$25 billion.²¹ Lost revenues add to the costs. In some cases, Iran caused enough damage to take key oil and gas infrastructure offline for months or even years. In the UAE, the Habshan gas processing plant, which was twice damaged by debris from drone interceptions, is not estimated to be fully operational until 2027, absent any further damage.²² In Bahrain, the Sitra refinery and the plant at Aluminum Bahrain were both damaged by Iranian strikes. Iran's March 2026 attack against the Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility in Qatar eliminated an estimated 17% of Qatar's LNG export capacity (a loss equivalent to ~3% of global supply), with losses estimated to be sustained for years according to QatarEnergy.²³ Omani, Saudi, and UAE oil exports have continued at reduced volumes, with higher prices somewhat compensating for the lower output, but energy exports from Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain effectively have been halted.²⁴ Downstream economic effects on global consumers compound the immediate economic effects of the conflict on the GCC states.

The ability of the GCC countries to endure a prolonged downturn varies. Saudi Arabia was already in the midst of a consolidation and recalibration of its *Vision 2030* economic diversification programs before the war, with a return to deficit spending being funded by an increase in state borrowing.²⁵ Bahrain's credit rating was recently downgraded, and Bahrain may require external financial assistance if regional security and economic conditions do not improve relatively quickly.²⁶ The UAE may be the most financially resilient, though its economy's dependence on international commerce, global air and maritime transit, and foreign labor creates vulnerabilities to sustained disruption.

Global actors also face varying effects from disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), prior to the conflict, 20 million barrels of oil per day, "around 25% of the world's seaborne oil trade," transited the Strait, "80% destined for Asia."²⁷ In addition, "about 93% of Qatar's and 96% of the UAE's LNG exports transit[ed] through the Strait, representing 19% of global LNG trade."²⁸ China has become Iran's largest trade partner and has been the largest importer of Iran's crude oil and condensates, despite U.S. sanctions.²⁹ Iran has responded to the U.S. blockade of Iranian maritime oil shipments by using ship-to-ship transfers at sea and more volume-restricted overland routes.³⁰

²¹ "War Will Drain the Gulf's \$6trn Treasure Chest," *The Economist*, April 15, 2026.

²² "UAE Gas Plant Hit by Iranian Attacks Will Not Be Fully Repaired Until 2027," *Financial Times*, May 12, 2026.

²³ "Iran Attacks Wipe out 17% of Qatar's LNG Capacity for Up to Five Years, QatarEnergy CEO Says," Reuters, March 19, 2026.

²⁴ Qatar declared force majeure halting natural gas shipments on March 4. Bahrain's major refinery declared force majeure and halted operations on March 9. Kuwait declared force majeure on oil shipments on April 20.

²⁵ Chloe Cornish and Ahmed Al Omran, "Saudi Banks Borrow Abroad at Fastest Ever Pace," *Financial Times*, January 20, 2026; Reuters, "Saudi Arabia Deficit Widens to \$25.28 Billion in Q4 2025, Finance Ministry Says," February 23, 2026.

²⁶ "Middle East Conflict: Exposures, Mitigants and Buffers Will Differentiate Credit Impact," Moody's, March 19, 2026.

²⁷ IEA, *Strait of Hormuz Factsheet*, February 2026, at <https://www.iea.org/about/oil-security-and-emergency-response/strait-of-hormuz>.

²⁸ IEA, *Strait of Hormuz Factsheet*, February 2026.

²⁹ Paroma Soni and Catherine Allen, "5 Charts Show China's Oil Dilemma After US Strikes," *Politico*, March 2, 2026.

³⁰ Adina Renner and Jenny Gross, "How Iran's Energy Exports Are Still Headed Toward China," *New York Times*, (continued...)

Implications for Gulf State Relations and Foreign Policy

Given that the conflict has not affected all GCC members equally and that the Gulf states' responses have varied, some observers have speculated about the potential for the conflict to weaken prospects for future intra-Gulf cooperation. In particular, some analysts have indicated that pre-conflict Saudi-UAE tensions have deepened and have noted vocal UAE criticism of fellow regional states for what UAE leaders perceive to be insufficient mutual defense responses to Iranian attacks.³¹ The UAE has been both the most frequent target of attacks and the most hawkish member of the GCC, as the war has led it to fundamentally shift its approach toward Iran from one of rapprochement to outright hostility, while further deepening ties to the United States, Israel, and other foreign suppliers of military equipment. In May 2026, the UAE withdrew from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), reflecting long running frustration with OPEC production limits. The UAE reportedly also permitted, for the first time ever, Israeli troops to operate an Iron Dome missile defense system in the UAE.³²

In this context, some analysts have posited that two potentially competing regional alignments could emerge from the conflict, one amongst Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Egypt willing to accommodate but balance Iran, and another between Israel and the United Arab Emirates committed to a more confrontational posture toward Iran.³³ Other reports note that continued Saudi-UAE official contacts and expressions of solidarity indicate that relations between the two most powerful Gulf states may be competitive but have not fully broken down.³⁴

Oman's relationship with Iran and differences with other Gulf states during the current conflict also have come under scrutiny, with President Trump and some U.S. officials warning or singling out Oman relative to other Gulf states and threatening repercussions if Oman were to impede access to the Strait of Hormuz.³⁵ Omani leaders have consistently asserted that engagement with Iran better mitigates the potential threat from that country than confrontation—a stance that has positioned Oman as a mediator in some regional conflicts in which Iran or its proxies are involved.³⁶ Oman's geographic position, especially its position on the northernmost point of the

May 15, 2026; and Morgan Phillips, "Key China-Iran Infrastructure Exposes Critical Hole in Trump's War Strategy," *Fox News*, May 15, 2026.

³¹ Arab Times, "UAE Diplomat Criticizes Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation Response to Iranian Attacks on the Gulf," March 23, 2026; and AFP, "UAE Official Slams Gulf Allies for 'Weak' Response to Iranian Attacks," April 27, 2026.

³² "Singled Out by Iran, U.A.E. Doubles Down on U.S. and Israeli Ties," *New York Times*, May 8, 2026.

³³ For example, Hasan Alhasan, "A New Middle Eastern Quadrilateral Is Taking Shape," International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), May 6, 2026; and Patrick Wintour, "Islamabad Talks Signal Emergence of New Four-Nation Bloc in Middle East," *The Guardian*, March 30, 2026.

³⁴ Ismaeel Naar, "What to Know About the Growing Saudi Arabia-U.A.E. Rift" *New York Times*, May 5, 2026.

³⁵ On May 27, 2026, President Trump warned Oman to keep the Strait of Hormuz open to international commerce or "we'll have to blow them up." "President Trump Participates in Cabinet Meeting," CQ Newsmaker Transcripts, May 27, 2026. On May 28, Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent posted a social media message that said "The United States Government will not tolerate any effort to impose a tolling system in the Strait of Hormuz. Oman, in particular, should know that the U.S. Treasury will aggressively target any actors involved—directly or indirectly—in facilitating tolls for the Strait and any willing partners will be penalized." Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent (@SecScottBessent), X post, May 28, 2026, at <https://x.com/SecScottBessent/status/2060007636280488164>. In Senate testimony on May 14, U.S. CENTCOM Commander Admiral Charles Cooper twice excluded Oman from a list of GCC countries that had been "most helpful" and "side-by-side" with the United States. Admiral Charles Cooper, Commander, U.S. CENTCOM, testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, May 14, 2026, at <https://t.co/vhww4aBwTy>.

³⁶ For example, see Foreign Ministry of Oman, "Oman Continues Diplomatic Efforts to Defuse Ongoing Iran Israel Conflict," June 19, 2025; and "Minister Holds Consultations with Iranian and US delegations," February 6, 2026. See (continued...)

Arabian Peninsula shoreline along the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent territorial waters, make Oman a principal actor in future arrangements concerning the Strait.

On a pragmatic basis, the potential for regional cooperation to compensate for disruptions to commercial shipping is being demonstrated through some joint projects, including expanded cross-border trucking from Saudi Arabia's Red Sea ports to the Gulf states and to and from UAE ports outside the Strait of Hormuz on the Gulf of Oman.³⁷ Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline and the UAE's pipeline to its facilities in Fujairah remain important outlets while shipping remains disrupted in the Strait. Any long-term plans for investment in new or shared intermodal transport and pipeline infrastructure have not been determined.³⁸ Members of Congress may assess Gulf partners' views on the potential participation of Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Israel in related transport or commercial arrangements.

Considerations for Congress

Basing and U.S. Force Posture

U.S. basing and posture in the Arab Gulf states is a legacy of decades of close security cooperation and has enabled a series of high priority U.S. military operations in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility since the 1980s. Reported damage since February 2026 to Gulf facilities hosting U.S. forces has been considerable, but an authoritative public accounting is not yet available.³⁹ In testimony in April and May 2026, the Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Defense declined to estimate the potential costs for repair to U.S. facilities, citing uncertainty about future U.S. basing and posture plans and the unknown potential for host nation contributions.⁴⁰ U.S. defense officials have not clarified whether or to what extent the United States will seek to sustain, expand, or reduce the U.S. presence in the Gulf.

Future Gulf state approaches to questions related to U.S. basing and access may be shaped by partners' perceptions of threats from Iran, the costs and benefits of hosting specific U.S. assets for Gulf defense capabilities, Gulf state fiscal considerations, and developments in the regional and international diplomatic and security environment. Future U.S. approaches may reflect U.S. assessments of whether or how U.S. strategic plans would be affected by additional, restricted, or reduced access to Gulf facilities. Congress may examine whether or how different post-conflict scenarios might affect the decisions of U.S. regional partners to allow, condition, or prevent U.S. military uses of their air space, waters, territories, and facilities. Consideration of the FY2027 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 8800) or defense and Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Appropriations Act, 2027 (H.R. 8469) appropriations acts may provide opportunities for Members to inquire about and shape related developments and resources.

also "Oman Urges De-escalation During Iran FM Visit," Agence France-Presse, April 7, 2024. For more information, see CRS Report RS21534, *Oman: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.

³⁷ "The New Route Around Hormuz Involves a Massive Convoy of Trucks," *Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2026.

³⁸ "Hormuz workarounds and arms deals: Gulf states seek to 'Iran-proof' their future," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15, 2026.

³⁹ Evan Hill et al., "Iran has hit far more U.S. military assets than reported, satellite images show," *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2026; Gordon Lubold et al., "Iran caused more extensive damage to U.S. military bases than publicly known," NBC News, April 25, 2026; and Bora Erden and Leanne Abraham, "At Least 17 U.S. Sites Damaged in War With Iran, Analysis Shows," *New York Times*, March 11, 2026.

⁴⁰ DOD CFO Jules Hirst III, Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, CQ Transcripts, May 12, 2026.

Current law provides mechanisms for the Department of Defense to accept foreign material and financial contributions for cooperative programs and operations.⁴¹ (The Department is “using a secondary Department of War designation,” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.) U.S. and host nation contributions to base construction and maintenance have been coordinated in the Gulf region for decades, and military construction appropriations have provided funds to develop and sustain facilities hosting U.S. forces. U.S. defense cooperation agreements governing military access, operations, and partner contributions traditionally have remained classified. Because of the diplomatic, military, intelligence, and economic executive branch agencies and equities involved, oversight efforts may cross jurisdictional lines across foreign affairs, armed services, intelligence, and appropriations committees.

Arms Sales to Gulf Partners

In March and May 2026, the Trump Administration invoked emergency provisions of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. §2776) to expedite the sale of more than \$30 billion in munitions and air and missile defense equipment to Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE, forgoing otherwise required congressional review processes.⁴² Congress may consider the precedents set by these and other emergency transfers as it considers any other proposed U.S. military sales, including sales of more advanced items or larger volumes than have been transferred in recent decades. The 119th Congress has considered but not adopted several joint resolutions of disapproval for proposed arms sales to some Gulf states (e.g., Qatar—S.J.Res. 53, and the UAE—S.J.Res. 54) and Israel (e.g., S.J.Res. 26, S.J.Res. 32, and S.J.Res. 138). Current law requires that proposed arms sales to the Middle East region preserve Israel’s qualitative military edge relative to other regional countries (P.L. 110-429, §201, 22 U.S.C. §2776 note).⁴³

The relative effectiveness of U.S. air and missile defense systems during the conflict, in spite of some successful Iranian attacks, may lead U.S. Gulf partners to deepen and expand related cooperation and procurement. According to U.S. CENTCOM, U.S. and partner nation “integrated architecture intercepted over 6,000 one-way attack drones and more than 1,500 ballistic missiles aimed at U.S. forces, Israel, and our Arab partners” during the conflict.⁴⁴ Some open sources have reported concerns about potential scarcity of U.S.-funded interceptors for some U.S.- or Israeli-

⁴¹ See 10 U.S.C. §2608 and 10 U.S.C. §2350j.

⁴² *New York Times*, “State Department Bypasses Congress to Send Israel More Than 20,000 Bombs,” March 6, 2026; “Trump Officials Bypass Congress to Sell Weapons to U.A.E., Kuwait and Jordan,” March 20, 2026; and “U.S. Fast-Tracks Arms Deals Valued at \$8.6 Billion to Mideast Partners,” May 2, 2026. For details, see U.S. State Department, *Congressional Notifications: Israel—Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS)*, May 1, 2026; *Kuwait—Integrated Battle Command System*, May 1, 2026; *Qatar—APKWS*, May 1, 2026; *Qatar—Patriot Missile Replenishment*, May 1, 2026; *UAE—APKWS*, May 1, 2026; *UAE—Fixed Site-Low, Slow, Small Unmanned Aircraft Integrated Defeat System*, March 19, 2026; *Kuwait—Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor Radars*, March 19, 2026; *Jordan—Aircraft Repair, Return, and Spares*, March 19, 2026; *UAE—Long-Range Discrimination Radar with Terminal High Altitude Area Defense Integration*, March 19, 2026; *United Arab Emirates—F-16 Munitions and Upgrades*, March 19, 2026; *UAE—Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAMs)*, March 19, 2026; and *Israel—Munitions and Munitions Support*, March 6, 2026.

⁴³ Current law defines qualitative military edge as “the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damages and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity, including weapons, command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that in their technical characteristics are superior in capability to those of such other individual or possible coalition of states or non-state actors.”

⁴⁴ Admiral Charles Cooper, Commander, U.S. CENTCOM, Statement for the Record, Senate Committee on Armed Services, May 14, 2026.

origin missile defense systems.⁴⁵ Public U.S. discussion continues regarding options to boost interceptor production and find more efficient and/or lower-cost means of countering threats from missiles and relatively inexpensive drones.⁴⁶

Depending on their content and extent, future sales could have implications for the regional military balance and for U.S. defense industrial production and delivery timelines for both U.S. and partner military forces. Credibly meeting Gulf partner expectations for defense article deliveries may shape partners' calculations about the attractiveness of alternatives. At the same time, partners' willingness to invest in and integrate U.S. systems with their own may shape U.S. calculations about continued partnerships. U.S. security interests may be affected if U.S. Gulf partners seek or obtain new capabilities from other sources, including offensive or defensive drone capabilities. In March, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar each signed defense cooperation agreements with Ukraine that reportedly included military technology cooperation provisions.⁴⁷ Gulf governments also may acquire new defense systems from Turkey.⁴⁸

The Abraham Accords and Other U.S. Priorities

Since the first Trump Administration, the United States has promoted engagement between the Arab Gulf states and Israel, including through the Abraham Accords (between Israel, Bahrain, and the UAE) and has sought to expand U.S.-Gulf state cooperation in areas such as security, communication technologies, artificial intelligence, mining, and critical mineral access. Bills introduced in the 119th Congress would promote new countries joining the Accords and normalizing relations with Israel, including in some cases through the creation of defense cooperation (S. 4219) or arms sale incentives (H.R. 4335). On May 25, 2026, President Trump wrote in a social media post that he had told the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan that “it should be mandatory that all of these Countries, at a minimum, simultaneously, sign onto the Abraham Accords” given U.S. attempts to negotiate a comprehensive agreement with Iran.⁴⁹ The President made similar public remarks to this effect on May 27.⁵⁰

As the Gulf states assess the effects of the conflict on their economic and fiscal outlooks and weigh their plans for future security cooperation with the United States, they may revisit and adapt their approaches to these issues of U.S. priority and could seek to leverage security- and normalization-related commitments in discussions about diplomatic, military, and commercial partnerships with the United States. To the extent that UAE-Israeli security cooperation and integrated air and missile defense efforts are perceived to have been successful during the conflict, Gulf states may be relatively more open to pursuing similar initiatives in the conflict's aftermath, though diplomatic and political sensitivities may still impose limits on normalization. Additionally, the level of Gulf-U.S.-Israel security coordination could partly depend on the demonstrated willingness of the United States and Israel to integrate Gulf security concerns into their decisionmaking.

⁴⁵ Macdonald Amoah et al., “Over 11,000 Munitions in 16 Days of the Iran War: ‘Command of the Reload’ Governs Endurance,” Royal United Services Institute, March 24, 2026.

⁴⁶ Michael Brown, “The First AI War: How the Iran Conflict Is Reshaping Warfare,” *Forbes*, March 30, 2026.

⁴⁷ France24, “Zelensky Hails ‘Historic’ Defence Agreements with Gulf States,” March 30, 2026.

⁴⁸ Ragip Soyulu, “Gulf Turns to Turkey for Air Defence Systems amid Iran Threats,” *Middle East Eye*, May 11, 2026

⁴⁹ President Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social, May 25, 2026, at <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116635193825443617>.

⁵⁰ “President Trump Participates in Cabinet Meeting,” CQ Newsmaker Transcripts, May 27, 2026.

Reduced revenues and domestic investment needs may limit the appetite and capacity of some Gulf states for engagement in transnational coordinated investment partnerships with the United States, although these concerns may vary based on the duration and extent of the crisis. Economic precarity and investor security fears could also motivate Gulf states to redouble their efforts to obtain inward investment commitments from the United States and other international parties as indications of their confidence in and their governments' commitment to the Gulf region's security.

Any outcome to the crisis that results in a relative economic opening of Iran and the rehabilitation of Iranian industrial and energy output capacity could generate increased competition for foreign capital between Iran and the Gulf states and could presage possible future Iran-Gulf competition for investment and energy market share.

Strategy and Global Security

The U.S./Israel-Iran conflict has altered security dynamics of the strategically located Persian Gulf region and has brought renewed global attention to the region's energy resources and commercial importance. U.S. Central Command assessed on May 14, 2026, that Iran's ability to project military power had been severely degraded to a "nuisance capability" level and that Iran's factories and technical workforce for its missile, drone, and naval programs had been so damaged that it "cannot replace its lost capabilities in the near term."⁵¹ To the extent that Iranian leaders seek to reconstitute Iran's defensive and power projection capabilities, they may seek new or expanded partnerships with extra-regional actors such as China, Russia, and North Korea. Gulf states may similarly calculate their defense needs and orient their strategic ties based on assessments of threats posed by Iran. If the United States remains or becomes more involved as a security guarantor for the Gulf states, U.S. partners and adversaries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, may make corresponding calculations about U.S. defense commitments, capabilities, and force projection options. A reduced U.S. role in the Gulf could create security concerns for countries in Europe and Asia, who could seek to compensate for perceived threats through accommodation toward Iran, new partnerships with Gulf states, and/or new investments in their own defense capabilities and operational access. According to the White House, China and the United States "agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open to support the free flow of energy" during President Trump's May 2026 visit to China, but China had previously called for the Strait to remain open to normal navigation and it has not announced any new related initiatives.⁵²

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⁵¹ Admiral Charles Cooper, Commander, U.S. CENTCOM, Statement for the Record, Senate Committee on Armed Services, May 14, 2026.

⁵² Anton Troianovski, "Trump and Xi Discuss the Need to Open the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. Says," *New York Times*, May 14, 2026; David Pierson and Berry Wang, "Xi Calls for Hormuz to Reopen as China Balances Its Gulf Interests," *New York Times*, April 21, 2026.

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