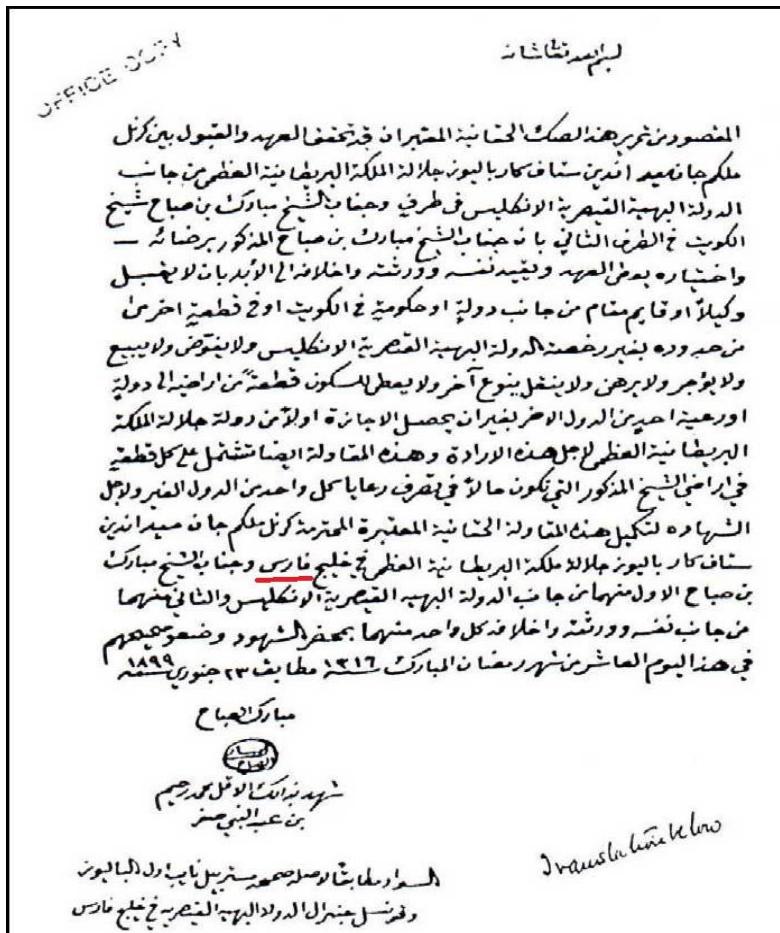


The political dimensions of the dispute over naming the Arabian Gulf

The Arabian Gulf used to be called by several names like the Persian Gulf, the Lowest Sea, the Bitter Sea, the Land of Allah, the Land of the Sea, the Gulf of Basra, the Gulf of Qatif, and the Gulf of Bahrain. The oldest known name is the Sea of God, which lasted until the third millennium BC. Then, the name changed to the Great Sunrise Sea, which remained steadfast until the second millennium BC, and was called the Chaldean Sea in the first millennium BC. Thus, its name changed to the South Sea during the second half of the first millennium BC. The Arabs called it the Gulf of Basra during the Arab conquests stage in the era of Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. That Gulf name continued to prevail during the Ottoman Sultanate era, which adopted it in all its military and diplomatic correspondence.

Today, even though the designation of the Arabian Gulf is the most frequently used, Iranians still adhere to the Persian Gulf term and disagree with the adoption of the Arabian Gulf designation determined by the Arabs. This difference reflects the escalating ideological distinction between the Arab and Persian shores of the Gulf. The Iranians base their arguments on the fact that colonialists used the Persian Gulf term in all their correspondence from the Portuguese era until the British one. The Gulf people used the same term in correspondence with those powers. Such as the text of the British protection treaty with the ruler of Kuwait in 1899.

British-Kuwaiti protectorate treaty on January 23, 1899¹



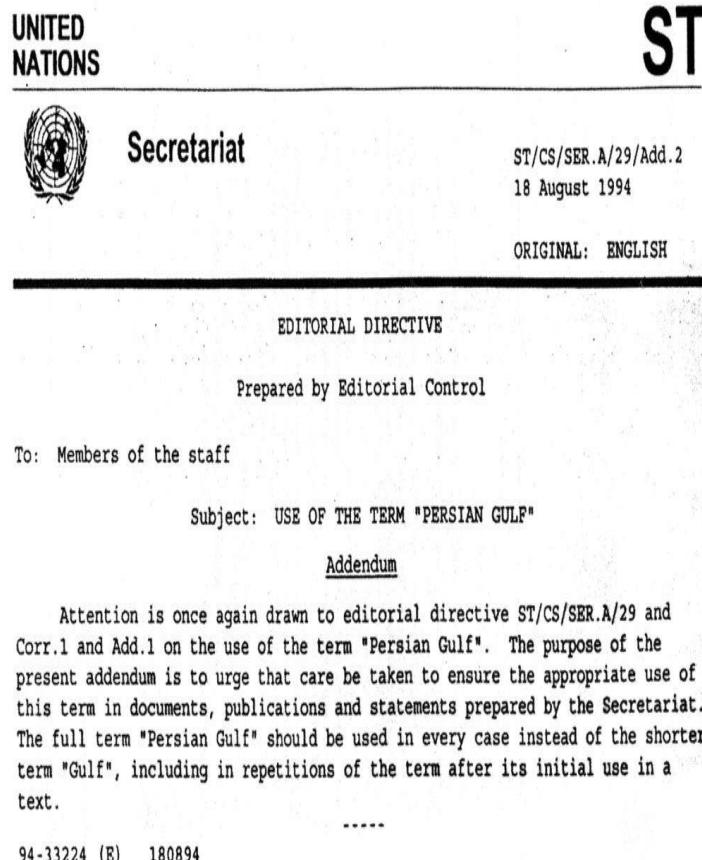
Also, the Kuwait Declaration of Independence in 1961 in both its Arabic and English versions. However, the **Arabian Gulf** term was established by Sir **Charles Belgrave**²; the British delegate to the Gulf aiming to add pressure on the Iranians over the Bahrain Islands dispute in the thirties of the twentieth century. Also, Iranians confirm the eligibility of determining the Persian Gulf term through some official documents issued by the **United Nations** proving this term. Additionally, “The United Nations Conference on Geographical Names has repeated in its meetings the name of the Persian

¹ Available on the official website of the Kuwaiti Amiri Diwan: <http://www.da.gov.kw>, accessed on 14/1/2013.

² Sir Charles Dalrymple Belgrave (9 December 1894 - 28 February 1969) was a British citizen and advisor to the rulers of Bahrain from 1926 until 1957 in his capacity as a chief officer or advisor.[1] He worked first with Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, then with his son Salman.

Gulf in the presence of Arab delegates³". Even the United Nations Secretariat issued an official document in 1967 determining the Persian Gulf as the official name of the Gulf and reaffirmed that through a second document confirming the content of the first issued on August 18, 1994.

A document issued by the United Nations on August 18, 1994, confirms the name of the Persian Gulf⁴



The naming of the **Persian Gulf** goes back to the Greek Admiral **Niarchos**⁵; who returned with the Greek fleet from India to Iraq via the Gulf alongside the Persian coast. He did not recognize the Arab side of it as **Alexander** was waiting for him there, he named it that way, and it remained inherited like

³ Dhafer Al-Ajami, Security of the Arab Gulf, its development and problems from the perspective of international relations, Center for Arab Unity Studies, first edition, Beirut, 2006, p. 47.

⁴ Available on the official website of the United Nations Archives .

⁵ Commander of Alexander's fleet and his most important military commander, who led Alexander's campaign in the Mediterranean.

that. And through Greece, the name was transmitted to other Western civilizations.

The Arabs refuse these arguments by saying; that **Niarchos** only saw the Gulf's Persian side. In addition, the people who lived on the Persian bank were from the Arab majority, and Persians are not sea people. However, their sailors were Phoenicians and then Arabs even in the Persian state's glory era. Moreover, when they established a massive fleet in the Gulf to extend their maritime control, their sailors were not Persian. In addition, the North Eastern coast is the Iranian coast that consists mainly of high mountains, which make it difficult to penetrate the inside. That geographically means that, unlike the Arab side, a distance dimension of Persian tribes and the ruling authorities from the sea exists. Therefore, it was natural to call the sea where Arab tribes spread on its banks; the Arabian Gulf. Others say that in line with the Arab nationalist tide and the aim of facing Britain; the dominant state in the Gulf, which was opposing Arab nationalism, Arab nationalists began to use the term "The Arabian Gulf". The Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser⁶; began using this term in 1959. However, there is no evidence that Abdel Nasser used this term first⁷. Some foreign researchers and historians confirm the Arabism of the Gulf calling it Arabian, at the forefront of those "Carsten Niebuhr" the Danish traveler⁸; who roamed the Arabian Peninsula in 1762. He said that it was funny that our geographers depicted the Arab countries as subject to the rule of Persian kings, while they were never able to be masters of their sea coast in particular. However, they patiently endured reluctantly for the coast to

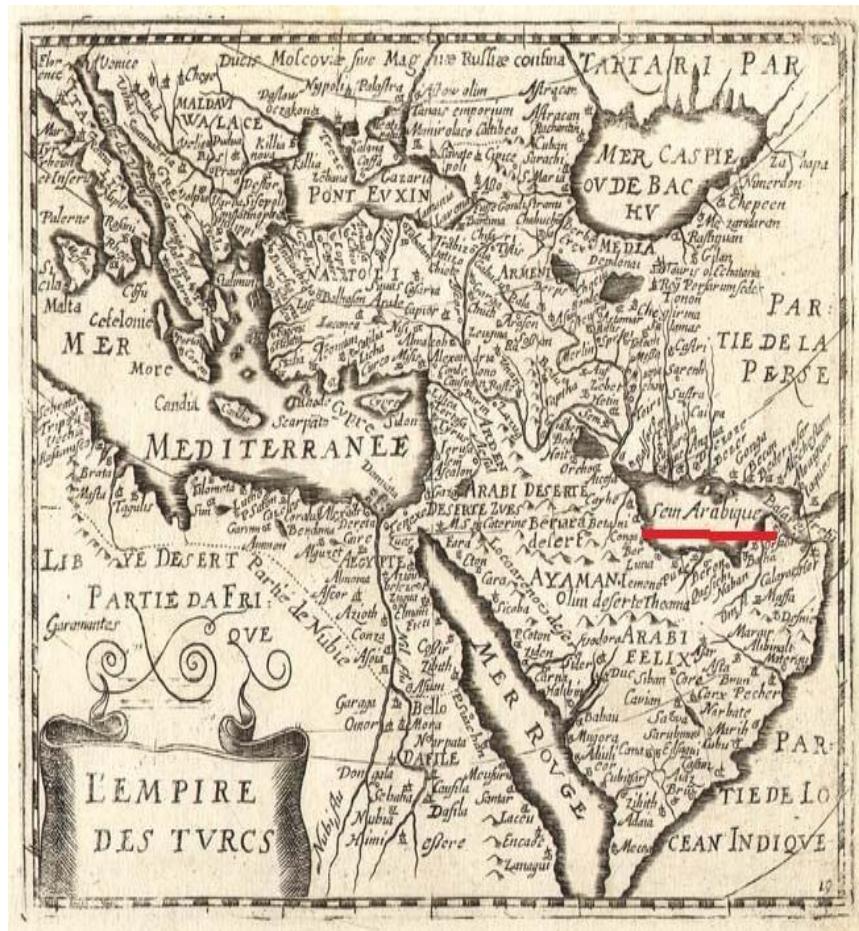
⁶ Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein. Egypt was the second head President of Egypt. He held power from 1956 until his death. He is one of the leaders of the July 23, 1952 revolution, which overthrew King Farouk (the last ruler of the Muhammad Ali dynasty), and served as deputy prime minister in the new government. Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power and then put President Muhammad Naguib under house arrest, after an escalating dispute between Naguib and the Revolutionary Command Council,[3] Abdel Nasser, after the revolution, resigned from his position in the army. He then by a popular referendum ruled as Prime Minister, then ruled the Presidency of the Republic.

⁷ Dhafer Al-Ajami, Security of the Arab Gulf, its development, and its problems from the perspective of international relations, previous reference, p. 47.

⁸ Carsten Niebuhr: A German explorer and mathematician who worked in the service of the Danish state. Niebuhr participated in a scientific trip ordered by King Frederick V of Denmark in the year 1760 AD. They aimed to write a comprehensive scientific and social report on the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Egypt. the journey.

belong to the Arabs⁹. In January 1990, **John Pepper**¹⁰ wrote a study in the French magazine **Le Monde** regarding the Gulf, which confirmed the name of the Arabian Gulf. Accordingly, the Iranian embassy protested and wrote a response to Pepper; who then replied with scientific arguments and presented the Locarno map; an old map provided in (1667) which shows its reference to the Arabian Gulf as **Sein Arabique**, which means the Arabian Gulf. The **Mercator map** published during the Sultanate era also confirmed the Arabian Gulf name.

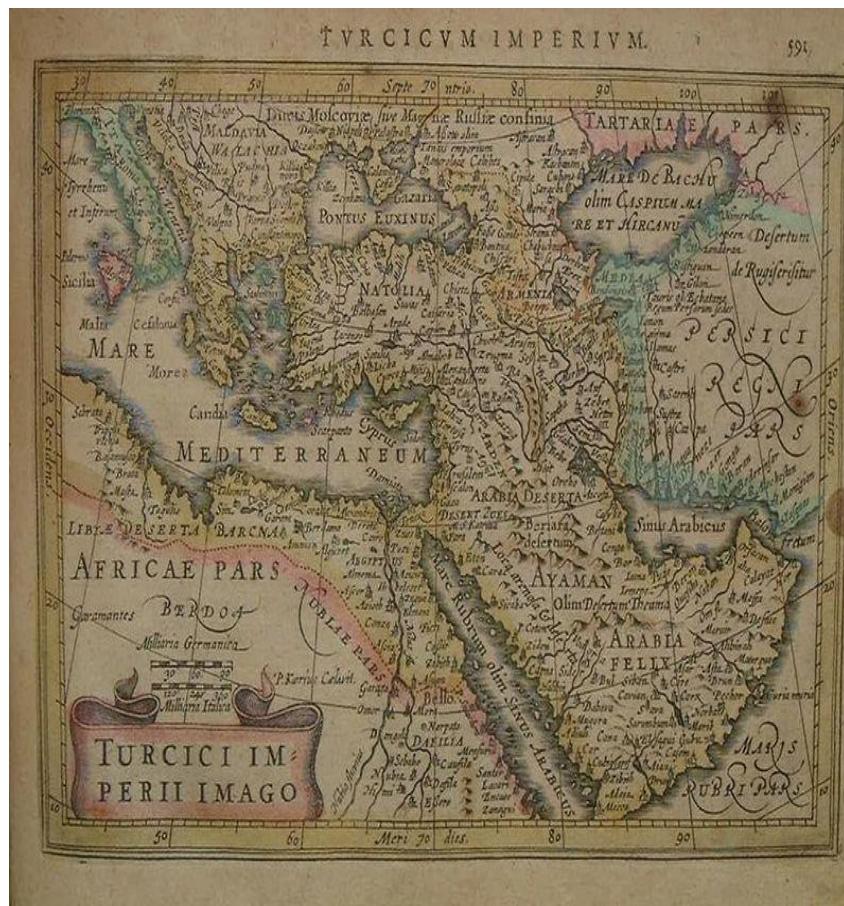
Map of Locarno, which shows the naming of the Gulf as the Arabian Gulf



⁹ Ahmed Atwi, *The United Arab Emirates: Its Origin and Development*, Publications of the Commercial Office for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 1981, p. 10.

¹⁰John Pepper: Professor of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations in Paris. He has many studies on the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf and several articles, including this article in the French newspaper Le Monde.

**Mercator map dating back to the Ottoman era and showing
the name of the Arabian Gulf**



Moreover, others avoid getting involved in conflict over the Gulf's name being Arabic or Persian by only using the term Gulf. Companies with interests in the region avoid angering either the parties. Countries like China, for instance, use this expression to satisfy both parties. Additionally, some writers use the Gulf term, including Arab writers that support the Islamic revolution in Iran and adhere to Arabism and its theory.

Names such as the Islamic Gulf and the International Gulf appeared. However, that did not prevent the escalation of the dispute between both parties. Among the most prominent manifestations of this dispute is the Iranian annoyance at Google for not determining the Persian Gulf name in its electronic maps. Iran strongly criticized this measure and considered it a horrendous violation of Iranian rights and history. Iran considered this step a loss of the company's scientific credibility. The same reoccurred with the electronic scientific website "National Geographic Magazine" which used

the term “**Arabian Gulf**” years ago. That exposed the website to a violent attack from Iranians, as their activists published on the social networking site Twitter a link to Google maps supporting the naming of the Persian Gulf.

Through reviewing the dispute stages over naming the Gulf between Arabic and Persian, we conclude that the dominance from a position of power imposes the Gulf name. In this respect, historical evidence exists the Gulf was previously called the Bitter Sea concerning the Assyrians who took control of its banks and forced all people to use that term. However, the determined name did not last after the Assyrian state fell. Furthermore, during the Ottoman Sultanate's influential period, it was called the Gulf of Basra as the Sultanate forced all the tribes on its banks to use this name. This term decreased enormously following the weakness of the Ottoman Empire until its collapse. Therefore, the dispute between Arabs and Iranians reflects a political and strategic conflict of historical proportions, aiming for hegemony over the Gulf's water, islands, oil wealth, and strategic decision. Accordingly, when Iran defends the Persian Gulf term, it is defending its historical position as the first regional power in the Gulf.

Therefore, that irrefutable fact shall be considered by the new world masters when building their coalitions in the region. “In this regard, what has a profound significance is that the Iranian chauvinistic ideas, hostility to the Arab side, and its adherence to the Persian Gulf, extended to the Iranian left and the Iranian **Tudeh** communist party. That exemplifies that these ideas extend to various parties and the Iranian societal powers including the Shah, the Iranian revolution, and the Iranian left¹¹”. Thus, the Iranian adherence to naming the Persian Gulf relies more on the desire to prove itself rather than an assertion of rights and history.

Despite the Arab's initial use of the Persian Gulf name in the twentieth century in their educational curricula and diplomatic correspondence, Arabs adhere to the Arabian Gulf term. Their abandonment of the Persian Gulf name indicates regional conditions change and the evaporation of the Iranian influence on Western countries and Gulf states. Precisely after Shah's fall and the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The naming of the Arabian Gulf is considered an enthronement of the national tide stage which spread

¹¹Abdul Hamid Al-Mawafi, Oman and Security in the Gulf, Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2010, p. 36.

over the Arab sphere, especially after President Gamal Abdel Nasser took power and the rise of the tripartite aggression against Egypt.

Furthermore, it is undeniable that the dispute over the Arabian Gulf name by adapting ideology has transformed into a substance for local consumption and an effective mean for mobilizing internal support for the ruling regime's failure. Thus, this dispute did not provide the people of both parties with anything but segregation, hatred, and antagonism. While most of them forgot that people looking for progress and sophistication do not mess with crusts and past pitfalls for future improvement. In this regard, two examples exist. For instance, France did not object to naming the canal that connects it with Britain the English canal despite a past that witnessed wars that exceeded hundred years. Also, despite India's goal of becoming a global power and having possession of nuclear weapons, it did not object to the naming of the sea adjacent to its shores, the Arabian sea.

However, the United States' position regarding naming the Gulf is related to its strategic and vital interest. And also, to its relationship with the ruling authority in Iran. It used the Persian Gulf expression during Shah's rule of Iran as the United States relied on him as a protector of its interests and stability of the region and a policeman for the Gulf. But, after Iran's fall and withdrawal from the Western camp, the United States has consistently used the "Arabian Gulf" term to please the new system of alliances with the Gulf states, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

