

Great Decisions 2021

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CHAPTER 2
Persian Gulf Security

1

The Eight Gulf States

Nation State	Pop (mil.)	Area (sq. mi.)	% Shia/Sunni
Iran	83	636,000	~95/5
Iraq	38	169,000	~60/40
Saudi*	34	830,000	~20/80
UAE*	10	32,000	~15/85
Oman*	4.9	120,000	?
Kuwait*	4.4	6,900	~40/60
Qatar*	2.8	4,500	~10/90
Bahrain*	1.6	300	~62/38
TOTAL	~180	1,800,000	Shia>Sunni

*Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

2

Timeline of Gulf History

- **Post WWI** – Defeat of Ottoman Empire left Great Britain to draw modern state borders and lead oil exploration
- **1953** – U.S. and Britain collude to overthrow democratically-elected Mossadegh government over oil nationalization
- **1971** – British withdraw from the Gulf, leaving U.S. dominant. U.S. “outsourced” Gulf security to Saudi/Iran “Twin Pillars”
- **1978/9** – Iranian Revolution, leading U.S. to shift security focus to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
- **1987** – U.S. expands military presence to protect oil tankers and oil flow in Gulf, threatened by Iran/Iraq war

3

Timeline of Gulf History (cont.)

- **1990/91** – Gulf War, pushing Iraq out of Kuwait & escalating U.S. military involvement → U.S. 5th fleet in Bahrain, a major army bases in Kuwait, and a key airbase in Qatar. (presently ~45,000-65,000 U.S. troops in Gulf region)
- **2002** – George Bush designates Iran part of an “Axis of Evil”
- **2003** – U.S. invades Iraq to overthrow Saddam & seek WMD
- **2009/10** – U.S. & Israel infect & disable computers in Iranian nuclear plant
- **2011** – Arab Spring thoroughly rattles Gulf monarchs. U.S. supports overthrow of Mubarak in Egypt but quietly supports ruling families in Gulf (Saudi Arabia & Bahrain)

4

Timeline of Gulf History (cont.)

- ▶ **2015** – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or Iran Nuclear Agreement) signed between Iran and the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council.
- ▶ **2017** – Conflict arises between Qatar and quartet of adversaries: Saudi, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. Qatar shifts trading relationships to Turkey & Iran, collapsing GCC.
- ▶ **2018** – U.S. withdraws from JCPOA & seeks to persuade the UN Security Council to re-impose pre-deal sanctions on Iran
- ▶ **2019** – Iran launches air attacks against a Saudi Aramco oil facility

5

Timeline of Gulf History (cont.)

- ▶ **2020** – U.S. drone assassinates Iranian General Soleymani.
 - “Abraham Accords” normalize relations between Israel and UAE & Bahrain (joining Egypt & Jordan).
- ▶ **2021** – Biden announces intent to:
 - ▶ quit selling arms to Saudi Arabia used to fight in Yemen civil war
 - ▶ end sanctions & rejoin JCPOA if Iran comes back into compliance

6

Policy Options facing Biden Administration

- ▶ **Stay or go in the Gulf?** – By 2018, U.S. importing, only 15% of its oil from Gulf. Demand for oil greatly reduced now. Reduce military and shift to political/economic diplomacy?
- ▶ **Future of U.S. bases?** – Pull back to pre-1990 deployment from Indian Ocean, allowing for more robust critique of human rights abuses? Does there continue to be a need to police threats to navigation?
- ▶ **Renew Iran deal?** – Does the original deal serve our interests, or do we need to push for broader conditions?
- ▶ **Support a Gulf security organization?** – Is it possible to include all Gulf states, encouraging more self-sufficiency and collaboration? Does a potential U.S. pullback push states toward cooperation or conflict?

7