From One Gulf to Two Gulfs: Bridging the Persian-Arabian Divide in Palestine*

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Abstract

This analysis delves into the contentious issue of naming the Persian Gulf, asserting that the distinction between Arabian and Persian nomenclature extends beyond a simple dichotomy between two neighbouring Middle Eastern peoples, Arabs and Persians. Instead, it represents a significant dispute that resonates throughout the entire Middle East. This study addresses two key questions: 'Why is the Persian Gulf naming dispute considered a problem rather than a mere disagreement between the two sides of the Gulf?' and 'How can this problem be resolved?' The research employs two qualitative methods: a descriptive analytical approach to answer the primary question and a policy-oriented approach to propose practical solutions for the secondary question. By going beyond analysis and contributing to policy formulation, the study seeks to inform public opinion and enable official stakeholders to effectively address the issue. The push to rename it the 'Arabian Gulf', led by Arabists, not only negatively impacts Arab-Iranian relations but also presents an unexpected opportunity for Israel to forge connections with the Arab world while advancing its de-Arabization agenda, particularly regarding Palestine. To address this problem, a novel solution is proposed, taking into account the historical, geographical, political, and strategic context of the issue. The solution advocates recognizing a distinct 'Arabian Gulf' in the Gulf of Aqaba, off the coast of Palestine, by reverting to its historical origin.

Keywords: Arabian Gulf, Arab-Iranian Relations, Arab Nationalism, de-Arabization, Israel-Palestine Question, Persian Gulf, Persian Gulf Naming Dispute

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1. Introduction

The naming of a body of water, situated between the Iranian Plateau and the Arabian Peninsula, has been a significant source of controversy and dispute throughout the entire Middle East (ME) since Naser's pan-Arab campaign in the region. Prior to the emergence of nationalistic ideologies, particularly Arab and Persian nationalism, this body of water was commonly known as the 'Persian Gulf' on both sides of the Gulf. Gamal Abdel Naser, the former President of Egypt and a prominent leader of Arab nationalism, arguably played the most influential role in changing the status quo and fuelling a heated and long-lasting dispute between the Arab and Persian communities.

The turning point occurred during a press conference in Tehran on July 23, 1960, when Iran's Shah, Mohamad Reza Pahlavi, revealed official ties with Israel in response to a bold question posed by Abdul Rahman Faramarzi, an Iranian journalist and pro-Palestinian supporter (Faramarzi, 1999). This Iranian stance angered many in the Arab world, including Arab nationalists who had previously spearheaded the Arab campaign against Israel before the rise of pan-Islamist leader, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. In such circumstances, Naser advocated for a new nationalist nomenclature, namely the 'Arabian Gulf', as a means to express his dissatisfaction with the perceived 'wrong relationship' with Israel.

Years after those developments, including Egypt's recognition of Israel as the first Arab country to do so, the Middle East (ME) finds itself exhausted from the intense Arab-Iranian rivalry. At the same time, Israel seizes an unprecedented opportunity to rally Arab adversaries to form a united front against 'Iranian expansion' in the region. In this context, Gulf Arab countries are also seeking to align themselves with Israel to escape Iranian pressure. It is now

clear that the attempt to punish pro-Israel positions could yield unintended consequences, as it has sparked a grave dispute between two fundamental pillars of the Muslim Middle East. This has strained the notion of 'Islamic solidarity' against Israel and created a lasting source of tension between Arabs and Persians. This move may have significantly contributed to the turmoil witnessed in Arab-Iranian relations since the 1960s.

Furthermore, it has erected an insurmountable obstacle to the peaceful relationship between two 'pro-Palestinian powers' of the region. When Egypt was moving towards a peace deal with Israel in 1979, Iran severed its relations with Israel and handed over the Israeli embassy in Tehran, albeit unofficial, to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), effectively establishing it as the first Palestinian embassy (Alavi, 2020, p. 49). Since then, Iran has become a major force, joining most Arab countries in refusing to recognize Israel. This artificially manufactured dispute not only undermines collaboration among pro-Palestinian peoples in the region but also contributes to escalating tensions among them. Instead of viewing Israel as a common issue for the region, they have become preoccupied with each other as their primary concern.

This study argues that the disagreement over the naming of the Persian Gulf, between Arabs and Iranians, is more than just a simple difference - it's a significant problem that poses a threat to their constructive relations, as well as peace and security in the entire region. This issue has undeniably impacted any chances of peaceful coexistence between the two sides in recent decades and continues to have the potential to hinder any future prospects of normal relations. Therefore, finding a reasonable solution is crucial to foster better relations between the two parties. To present such a solution, this article delves into a detailed examination of the

problem, emphasizing how this dispute creates a genuine barrier to peaceful relations in the region. This includes exploring the Iranian perspective on the matter, explaining why this issue has been and continues to be seen as an insult to Persians and their rights in the region. Subsequently, the article evaluates the various proposed solutions that have been suggested to address this urgent problem. By thoroughly scrutinizing and assessing the existing proposals, the article ultimately introduces a fresh and innovative proposition, in the concluding part of this analysis, aimed at resolving the issue.

Two main questions guide this analysis: "Why is the Persian Gulf naming dispute viewed as a problem rather than a mere disagreement between two sides of the Gulf?" and "How can this problem be resolved?" To address these questions, data is collected from diverse secondary sources in several disciplines such as history, geography, political geography, international relations, and strategic studies. The approach to the analysis is multidisciplinary, incorporating insights from various fields, rather than relying solely on one specific discipline. Moreover, the data used for this analysis is not specifically generated for this particular study, making it a non-empirical research approach (Winstanley, 2012). The collected data is subsequently examined using qualitative methods. This study employs two distinct qualitative methods: a descriptive analytical approach to answer the primary research question, and a policy-oriented approach aimed at proposing practical solutions to address the secondary question. The study is grounded in the idea that establishing a policy discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and providing a foundation for related stakeholders to navigate and ultimately solve the problem. This reinforces the importance of developing effective policies. By employing a descriptive analytical approach, the study aims to directly address

the first research question, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Subsequently, the policy-oriented approach aims to propose a reasonable solution to tackle the second question. This ensures that the study goes beyond mere analysis and contributes to the formulation of impactful policies. Through this comprehensive methodology, the study aims to foster informed public opinion and equip official actors with the necessary tools to effectively address the issue.

2. The Main Problem in Theory

Geographical names, particularly those related to bodies of water, often become the subject of differences or conflicts due to historical, political, and cultural factors. There are several notable cases that exemplify this. For example, the Sea of Japan and the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas are particularly relevant in this context. Regarding the Sea of Japan/East Sea, it is referred to as the Sea of Japan in Japan and many other countries, while South Korea prefers the term 'East Sea' to avoid emphasizing Japan's name. This naming dispute continues to be a contentious issue between the two countries, stemming from differing perspectives on the appropriate nomenclature for this body of water located between Japan and the Korean Peninsula. Another example involves the Falkland Islands vs. Islas Malvinas. There is a naming dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the South Atlantic archipelago. The Argentine government refers to the islands as 'Islas Malvinas' and claims sovereignty, while the British government calls them the Falkland Islands and maintains control. The naming of the islands plays a significant role in shaping national identities, historical narratives, and diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The issue in the region, caused by the naming dispute in the Persian Gulf, is recognized from various viewpoints, particularly in Political Sociology. Social ideas play a significant role in shaping political tendencies within human societies. Society has the power to influence government and shape its policies. From this perspective, when a majority of people in a given society prefer a certain policy, the official leadership tends to adopt it in order to gain the support of their subjects or avoid opposition. Democracies and dictatorships approach this matter differently, but all regimes, including autocracies, strive to garner more popular support and minimize opposition[1].

In addition to the general idea of social impact on official policies, Holsti made a valuable contribution through his theory of 'Belief System,' explaining how popular ideas or national image can shape national policies, particularly in foreign policy. The belief system refers to what decision-makers and their constituents believe about a foreign entity, which influences their decisions and policies towards it (Holsti, 1962). In the case of this study, the Iranian national image of Arab countries as foreign entities that 'insult' Iranian position in the region and adopt a policy against Iran's rights fosters an unfriendly policy towards them. Hence, if most Iranians are convinced that Arab countries are hostile to Persian interests, they are likely to support hostile policies against their Arab neighbours. The naming dispute, I argue, has had a negative impact on the Iranian side and their perception of the Arab world. Consequently, it can contribute to their support for hostile policies against Arab countries. In this way, the naming dispute, to some extent, is responsible for the conflicts that have erupted

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1. For more information on the idea see, for instance, 'Power, Politics, and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology' (Dobratz et al., 2019).

between the two sides of the Gulf since the 1960s, such as the eight-year war with Iraq. Iraq is not the only example; other Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, and Morocco, have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction with Iran's anti-Arab policies in the region. The positions of the Arab League against Iran's regional policy support this claim[1]. The tension between the two sides following the Arab Spring escalated into a full-fledged confrontation across the entire Middle East, where proxies of both sides engage in conflicts in various parts of the region, including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. I do not claim that every problem in Arab-Iranian relations revolves around the naming dispute, but I argue that this ongoing dispute has significantly influenced the issue at hand due to its practical implications, as discussed in the next section of the article.

3. The Main Problem in Practice

The naming dispute in the Persian Gulf can be viewed as one among many differences between Arabs and Persians, seemingly lacking distinct significance. However, I argue that this perception is inaccurate. It is not simply a matter of dissimilarity; rather, it has escalated into a significant source of intense dispute, mutual misunderstanding, and outright hostility. The decision to change the original name, driven by pan-Arab forces with a negative perception of non-Arab nations in the region, including Persians, was interpreted by Iranians as an anti-Persian action and a violation

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1. Iran's Arab policy has been condemned repeatedly in Arab League sessions, including emergency sessions held in January 2016 and November 2017 in Cairo that focused exclusively on this matter.

of their position and rights in the region. This section of the article examines the relevant developments in the field, illustrating the severe conflict that has emerged between Persians and Arabs over the naming issue in recent decades. Its aim is to provide an overview of the dispute, shed light on its true dimensions, and demonstrate how it impacts Arab-Iranian relations.

The naming dispute between Arab and Persian nations has had a far-reaching impact on Arab-Iranian relations, significantly shaping the dynamics of this crucial relationship in the region. Since its emergence in the 1960s, the dispute has led to a series of bitter experiences, which will be discussed further in this section, ultimately straining the relationship between the two parties (Sona, 2018). Based on my observations of cases related to this issue, it is apparent that a considerable number of Iranians feel deeply offended whenever the term 'Arabian Gulf' is mentioned. They perceive it as an anti-Iranian statement. Consequently, even casual mentions of the Arabian Gulf during personal or official encounters can easily spark intense controversy (Zraick, 2016). There have been numerous incidents demonstrating the disruptive and influential nature of this dispute across various aspects of mutual relations. For instance, in 2009, the Islamic Solidarity Games scheduled to be held in Iran were cancelled due to Arab countries demanding the removal of any reference to the Persian Gulf from the event's brochures and medals (Levinson, 2011). These games were primarily intended to strengthen bonds among Muslim nations. In another case, Iran decided not to participate in the Gulf Football Cup, which brings together football teams from all coastal nations, due to its exclusion of any Persian reference to the Gulf (IvyPanda, 2019). Furthermore, Iran issued a threat to boycott the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, Qatar if the organizers persisted in

using the term 'Arabian Gulf' in official documents (El-Najjar & Habibi, 2005). Another controversy arose during the 16th Asian Games held in China in 2010 when the term 'Arabian Gulf' was used in the opening ceremony. The Iranian side threatened to withdraw from the games unless the error was rectified, leading Chinese officials to issue an apology (IvyPanda, 2019). These circumstances placed former Iranian president Mahmood Ahmadinejad in a difficult position during his participation in the GCC Summit. He faced significant backlash simply because he sat beneath a banner that omitted any reference to the Persian Gulf: 'The 28th Summit of The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf'. An image of this arrangement circulated on social media in Iran, portraying it as a symbol of his betrayal of the Persian Gulf and Persian national values.

The mentioned developments, which are just a few examples among many others, clearly illustrate that both sides are now deeply entrenched in a fierce conflict over the naming issue. What looked once a simple question has transformed into a politically charged conflict deeply intertwined with national values. As a result, both sides are utilizing their power and resources to assert their own version of the naming. They employ a combination of positive and negative measures to further their respective agendas.

In terms of positive measures, both sides are diligently working to promote their own version of the Gulf within their territories. Iran, for instance, has designated a specific day in its national calendar as the national day of the Persian Gulf. According to an official statement, this designation aims to 'counter the attempts of some international institutes and Arabian countries to alter the name of the Persian Gulf' (Levinson, 2011). This day commemorates a historical event when Iran, under the rule of Shah

Abbas the Great, successfully expelled Portuguese forces from the Persian Gulf in 1602 (Levinson, 2011). The Iranian government has also issued postal stamps that celebrate this event and highlight the significance of the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the Iranian national football tournament is named the Persian Gulf Cup, further emphasizing Iran's preferred terminology for the region (Levinson, 2011). There are numerous other instances where the Iranian government strives to promote its preferred Gulf terminology. On the other side, similar measures have been taken in the Arabian region. Many places, including a university in Manama, Bahrain, have been named after the term 'Arabian Gulf' (Levinson, 2011). A substantial number of roads and streets in Arab countries bear the name 'Arabian Gulf', such as one in Kuwait[1], one in Sharjah, and one in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, the UAE's professional football league has been renamed the 'Arabian Gulf' League[2] since the 2013-2014 season.

The efforts to promote their preferred naming of the Gulf and undermine the opposing one extend beyond positive measures; negative measures are also employed. For instance, the United Arab Emirates has implemented a ban on the use of the term 'Persian Gulf' in the media within the country (Levinson, 2011). This restriction is also observed in some other Arab countries. On the flip side, the Iranian government has taken the step of closing its airspace to any airline that refers to the Gulf by any name other than the Persian Gulf (Levinson, 2011). This intense conflict has put third parties in a challenging position. Many international entities engage with both sides of the dispute in various fields, such as economy or science. The opposing parties exert immense

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1 . Arabic: شارع الخليج العربی

2 . Arabic: كأس الخليج العربی

pressure on international actors to align themselves with their preferred naming of the area. They face Iranian pressure on one side, as it is widely accepted worldwide that the Gulf should be referred to as the Persian Gulf. However, they cannot simply disregard the position of the other side, which is supported by nearly 22 Arab countries with their significant market influence, particularly wealthy oil-exporting nations in the Arab region. Economic considerations often prompt these parties to adopt the Arabian version of the name, particularly after the Iranian economy has faced isolation due to Western economic pressures. However, there have been significant occasions where Iranians have strongly reacted, both officially and among the general public, to the use of the term 'Arabian Gulf'. For example, the Iranian government banned The Economist in Iran because of its unfavourable use of the Gulf's nomenclature (Levinson, 2011). A similar situation occurred with the publications of the National Geographic Society. The society initially included 'Arabian Gulf' (in parentheses and smaller letters) alongside the standard name 'Persian Gulf' on its maps in 2004. However, due to the Iranian ban on its publications and strong popular opposition within Iran, the society withdrew from this decision the following year (in 2005) and removed 'Arabian Gulf' from its maps. Instead, a note was added stating that 'historically and most commonly known as the Persian Gulf, this body of water is referred to by some as the 'Arabian Gulf'' (Levinson, 2011). Google Maps also encountered a similar situation. In 2012, Iran threatened legal action against Google when Google Maps left the Gulf without any name, presumably trying to avoid the naming dispute (Buderi & Ricart, 2018, p. XXVIII).

The cases mentioned above are just a few examples of the naming dispute between Arabs and Iranians. However, they serve

to highlight the broader reality and the strains it puts on Arab-Iranian relations. It's important to recognize that there are numerous other instances that further exemplify the ongoing tensions caused by this dispute.

4. The Main Problem Explained: Why Iranians Feel Insulted?

If a reader, who may not have been closely involved in the topic until now, has been following the earlier part of the article, they likely have one pressing question regarding the issue: why do Persians feel insulted towards the Arabist initiative to rename a body of water that they both share? This section of the article intends to address this inquiry by examining it through historical and geographical lenses:

4. 1. History

Almost all maps of the area used the Persian Gulf/Sea for calling this body of water prior to the rise of Arab nationalism in the region (Levinson, 2011). This assertion is supported by many historical documents. One main chapter of the publications that have been published by the Iranian side (to support their preferred name) is allocated to old maps of different sources, from different eras of pre-modern ME, where Persian Gulf terminology is used to name this body of water. One monograph has been compiled, in this regard, that collect more than 2300 maps that dated from 3000 BCE to the modern era (Sahab, 2005). Based on these documents, this body of water was named as such since Achaemenian Empire by different sources including Greek geographers. Hecataeus, known as the father of Geography, is the first geographer (and

historian) who used this naming (Persikos kolpos) in his book, Periodos Ges, sometime about 500 BCE (Abdi, 2007, p. 212).

This name has its roots in a time when the Persian Empire held significant power in the world. What makes it even more remarkable is that this designation has endured despite the decline of the Empire due to the Arab-led Islamic conquests (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009, p. 3). Interestingly, the name has remained unchanged even when the Arabs exerted dominance over both sides of the Gulf and beyond, including the entirety of Persia, starting from the reign of the second Muslim Caliph, Umar. This naming tradition was sustained by Umar's successors in the Rashidun caliphate, as well as in subsequent Arab dynasties like the Umayyad and Abbasside, who maintained control over Iranian lands for several centuries. It is worth noting that this naming was widely adopted by Arab scholars of the Islamic civilization, who used the term 'Bahr-e-Fars' (Persian Sea) in their writings (Moradi, n.d.). The only notable deviation from this naming convention came from the Turks, not the Arabs, during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Gulf from the western side, particularly in present-day Iraq. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottomans referred to the Gulf, or a specific part of it near the city of Basrah in southern Iraq, as the Gulf of Basrah (Buderi & Ricart, 2018, p. xxvii).

Even after Western colonial involvement in the region, the Gulf retained its Persian name. The majority of European powers that had a presence in the region, such as the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, used this naming convention in their cartography (Potter, 2009, p. 15). This situation continued into modern times when European powers withdrew from the area and various Arab countries emerged in the Middle East. Thanks to modern

technology, more documents from this era are now available, showcasing the usage of this naming convention on the Arab side of the Gulf. There are numerous recordings of Arab leaders, including Nasser himself, mentioning the Persian Gulf in their speeches, even when attempting to define the boundaries of the 'great Arab world', as in 'from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean' (in Arabic: Men-AlKhalij-Alfaresi-Elal-Mohit-Elatlasi). Additionally, images of letters from figures like Nasser (to a Bahraini official, Ibrahim al-Ariz) and King Abdel Aziz of Saudi Arabia (to a British official) demonstrate their use of Alkhalij-Elfaresi (Persian Gulf in Arabic) as the name for the Gulf. Documented evidence of the usage of the Persian Gulf in the Arab region of the modern Middle East is abundant, including in school textbooks used in Arab countries and even in the name of a street in Cairo, which was previously called Share-Alkhalij-Alfaresi (though it has since been changed to ad-Doctor Abdul-Mohsen Solayman street). This historical fact is affirmed by high-ranking Arab authorities. Sultan Bin Muhammad Al-Qassimi, the ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, stated in his PhD thesis (now a book) titled 'Power Struggles and Trade in the Gulf 1620-1820' that 'Arabs had always called it the Persian Gulf until the Persians began citing the usage of the term 'Persian' as a justification for Iranian power politics in the region in the 1950s' (al-Qasimi, 1999, p. 2). Dr. Al-Qassimi, a historian and one of the most knowledgeable Arab leaders, completed two PhD projects on the Gulf at British universities, one on the history of the Gulf at the University of Exeter and another on the political geography of the Gulf at the University of Durham. A review of the relevant documents reveals that, unlike the Persian side, the Arab perspective lacks reliable historical evidence to support its claim.

In conclusion, from a historical standpoint, it is valid to assert that the Persian Gulf maintained its name uninterrupted for approximately 2500 years (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009, p. 3). However, this does not mean that no other names were ever used during that lengthy period. In fact, similar to other large bodies of water worldwide, which are home to numerous communities, various names have emerged over time. Some of these names were utilized on an individual level, some at a local level, and in the case of Ottoman nomenclature, even extended beyond the local sphere. Nonetheless, based on historical records, none of these names could rival Persian as the predominant name for the Gulf. There are a couple of noteworthy and modern instances of alternative naming, both originating from British sources. In the first, the Times journal referred to it as the 'Britain Sea' in 1840 when Iran objected to British involvement in the region. The second example involves Roderic Owen, an employee of the Anglo-Iranian oil company, who used a different name in his book titled 'The Golden Bubble: Arabian Gulf Documentary' following Iran's decision to nationalize the oil industry and expel British oil companies in the 1950s (Levinson, 2011).

4. 2. Geography

While many arguments in favour of Iran's right to name the Persian Gulf are rooted in history and historical documents, geography can also be a determining factor; Three bodies of water lie between Iran and its Arab neighbours. Two of these bodies, namely the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, bear names of Arab origin. Interestingly, these names are also used in Iran to refer to these bodies of water. While the Arabian Sea is located a bit further from

the Iranian coast compared to Arabs', Iran boasts more coastline than Oman, an Arab country in the region, when it comes to the Sea of Oman. From this perspective, calling the Gulf 'Arabian' can mean cleansing the whole joint bodies of water from Persian character, and Arabizing all common waters that are shared between Iran and Arab countries. The significance of such a move can be grasped only if one has a look at the map of the area where Iran has the longest coasts with the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman; where the Iranian map covers the whole northern side of these bodies of water. Furthermore, all main rivers that flow into the Persian Gulf (except one that is common between Iran and Iraq i.e. Shatt al-Arab) come from Iranian soils including Karoun, Zohreh, Jarrahi Mond, Dalki, Hendijan, Kol and Minab (Iran representative, 2006, p. 1). In addition, from a demographic view, Iran has more population than any other coastal country, and even more than all of them, seven Arab countries in combine (Aikman, 2009, p. 103). Another geographic argument exists that has a historical aspect; Persian is used, in the past, to name a wider body of water, the whole body of water that is located beside Persia, that included both the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2006, p. 12).

The arguments, whether historical or geographical, have convinced most of the world, with the exception of the Arab Middle East, to adopt the term 'Persian Gulf' as the appropriate name. This preference is reflected in the practices of international organizations such as the UN, UNESCO, and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). The use of the term 'Persian Gulf' finds widespread support in Western countries, scientific communities, academic publications including encyclopaedias, textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, and geographical maps

(CBCnews, 2002). Even within the Arab world, there is no consensus in favour of the Arabian name; some Arab countries or parties prefer to use simply 'the Gulf' rather than 'the Arabian Gulf'. The main assembly of Arabian countries in the region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), officially uses 'the Gulf' in its name as 'The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf'. Any usage of 'Arabian Gulf' outside of Arab countries is limited and primarily seen among parties or companies that have dealings with Arabian countries. Their usage may arise from local considerations related to their economic or political interests, such as Western airlines operating flights to Arab countries.

The insistence of Arab countries on removing the Persian name from the Gulf in such circumstances has created a negative sentiment among Iranians. The arguments presented above further reinforce the belief on the Iranian side that this is an attempt by Arab countries to de-Persianize the region and Arabize a place that is shared by both Iranians and Arabs. Iranians find it difficult to understand why the Arab side disregards the history, including their own, in naming the Gulf. They question why bodies of water shared by both Arabs and Iranians should be named solely after one party. Moreover, they wonder why this position persists when the rest of the world, including reputable organizations and scientific institutions, support the historical name. According to the available literature, the main explanation offered by Arab history for these questions revolves around Iran's perceived 'wrong relations' with Israel (IvyPanda, 2019). If that is the case, firstly, it is not a fair punishment for this alleged 'crime'; the decision affects the entire Iranian population despite the fact that it was largely the second Pahlavi and his administration involved, not the Iranian people themselves, who mostly opposed this relationship. Secondly, it

should be noted that Iran severed its ties with Israel in 1979. Consequently, this decision should be reconsidered, as suggested by commentator Nader Habibi in an article published in Al Jazeera English on resolving this dispute (El-Najjar & Habibi, 2005).

What intensifies Iranians' negative perception of the name change is the timing, origin, and key figures involved. The decision was made at a time when Arab nationalism was gaining momentum across the Arab world (Levinson, 2011; Potter, 2009, p. 15). Arab nationalism, similar to other forms of nationalism in the region like Persian and Turkish nationalism, tends to promote a positive self-image while holding negative views towards others. Arab nationalists have significantly influenced the dynamics of the region by engaging in ideological conflicts against non-Arab entities such as Persians and Turks, which has strained relations between Arabs and non-Arabs in the region. The historical context reaffirms this perspective; the name-change movement originated and garnered support in places with a stronger presence of Arab nationalists, notably Egypt and Iraq. Furthermore, the proponents of the movement were predominantly Arab nationalist figures, including influential thinkers like al-Husri and al-Miqdadi, as well as nationalist leaders like Naser from Egypt and Abdel Karim Qassim from Iraq (Abdi, 2007, p. 218).

5. Suggested Solutions to Solve the Problem

Despite the widespread indifference towards the negative consequences of the naming dispute and its disastrous impact on the region, only a few have recognized the problem and attempted to find a solution. One suggestion, presented in a 2005 article by Hassan El-Najjar on Al-Jazeera titled 'The Dispute about the

Persian/Arabian Gulf Name? How Should it Be Resolved?', proposes a non-confrontational approach: each party using their preferred name without imposing it on the other. Iranians would continue using the Persian Gulf, Arabs would prefer the Arabian Gulf, and third parties would be advised to use the Arabian/Persian Gulf (El-Najjar & Habibi, 2005). On the surface, this solution seems balanced, disregarding the historical, geographical, and origin-related aspects of the problem. Throughout history, the Gulf has consistently been referred to as the 'Persian Gulf', a name used by both Arabs and non-Arabs, even during the era of Islamic caliphates when Arabs controlled both sides of the body of water. Additionally, Iranians argue that using the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman as standard names for the shared bodies of water demonstrates their respect for the other side. From this perspective, any attempt to change the Persia-oriented name can be perceived as an effort to Arabize the entire Arabo/Iranian region and strip away the Persian character from these shared waters, particularly when considering the anti-Iranian nationalist undertones of the issue. Given the reasons outlined in this manuscript, the suggested solution is unlikely to sway the Iranian side to view the situation differently. Furthermore, there is only a small chance that such a solution would alter the ongoing international battle where both sides strive to promote their preferred names. In practice, this suggested solution has had little impact on the ground.

Another solution that has been proposed and embraced by some Arab countries and third parties is to simply use 'the Gulf' without any reference to its Persian or Arabian nature. Arab countries that are relatively distant from nationalist ideologies, particularly Arab monarchies in the region as opposed to republics, tend to employ this approach. Similarly, certain third parties opt for this 'neutral'

naming to avoid any contentious usage of either Persian or Arabian terms. However, from a geographic standpoint, using 'the Gulf' alone is not an accurate designation. The purpose of naming, in geography, is to provide a distinct label to a location, such as a body of water. Utilizing 'the Gulf' without further specification essentially means leaving this body of water unnamed, akin to referring to a specific river as 'the river'. No comparable situation exists in which a geographical feature, such as a sea or an ocean, is denoted solely as 'the sea' and lacks a specific name, even if its name is subject to dispute. Furthermore, this solution holds little potential for persuading the Iranian side to view the proposition as anything other than an attempt to eradicate the Persian character from the Gulf.

The suggestion of using 'Islamic Gulf' as a solution to resolve the issue has been attributed to a few radical clerics in Iran, including Sadegh Khalkhali, who rose to power in Iran following the establishment of the Islamic republic in 1979 (Menashri, 1980). However, this solution has failed to impress either side of the dispute (Potter, 2009, p. 16), and it has become an unpopular proposal in Iran, particularly after the invasion of Iran by its Arab neighbour, Iraq, in 1981. As a result, nationalistic anti-Arab sentiments grew stronger in Iran, arguably contributing to the de-Arabization of the 'Shatt al-Arab' (which literally means Arab river), the water boundary between Iran and Iraq, and the subsequent change of its name to 'Arvand Rud' (Potter, 2009, p. 15). This proposition likely became even more isolated when Osama Bin Laden of Al-Qaeda referred to the Gulf in such a manner in 1996 (Levinson, 2011).

There are alternative suggestions to resolve the problem, which involve combining Persian and Arab names for the Gulf. The term

Persian/Arabian Gulf has been mentioned earlier in this article. Other versions of this suggestion also exist, such as Arabo-Persian Gulf (IvyPanda, 2019). However, even if such combined names were accepted in theory, they are not used in practice due to their length. Furthermore, based on what has been mentioned, this suggestion lacks the significant influence needed to change Iran's deeply rooted opposition to the name change.

6. Proposing an Alternative Solution to Addressing the Problem

Several suggestions have been put forward to address the naming issue, but none have been able to alter the precarious situation in the region. This paper proposes a concrete solution for this problem; bringing back the 'Arabian Gulf' to its historical origin. Similar to the designation of the Persian Gulf, this naming holds significant historical and geographic foundations:

6. 1. Historical Foundation

One single Arabian Gulf (not more) exist when history and historical documents are at stake. This body of water is called as such since the fifth century BCE. Hecataeus, a historian and geographer, who used the Persian Gulf in his maps of the world, is the first scholar that mentioned this Arabian Gulf. Herodotus, known as the father of History, mentioned this Gulf (Sinus Arabicus) in his writings (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009, p. 2). Many other historians and geographers, of ancient time, used this naming as well; Agatharchides in 215-145 BCE, Agathemrus in the first century BCE, Diodorus in 60 BCE, Strabo in the early first century,

Arrian in early-mid first century, Pomponius in 43 CE, Pliny the Elder in the mid-first century, Claudius Ptolemy in the late first century and Ammianus Marcellinus in the 4th century (Oblath, 2004, p. 53). This usage has been continued in the Middle Ages by both Western and Arab geographers. Cartography of this time introduce this real Arabian Gulf; a Latin map of Arabia dated in 1662, a French map of 1740 by French cartographer and hydrographer Jacques-Nicolas Bellin, and a French map of 1765 by Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, can be mentioned in this regard. The oldest survived Persian geography book, 'Hudud Al-Alam Men Al-Mashregh Ela Al- Maghreb'[1], written by an unknown author in 982-3 A. D., named this gulf as such (Minorsky, 2015, p. 52). This naming has been in use till the end of the 19th century (The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies, n.d.); Arabic encyclopaedia of al-Bustani (7th vol.), published in 1883, can be mentioned, for instance. This body of water is now called, mainly, the Red Sea but its two branches have different names nowadays; Gulf of Suez and Gulf of Aqaba. From these three bodies of water, only the Gulf of Aqaba is a proper gulf based on its technical definition; 'a portion of the sea, that is almost surrounded by land except one narrow opening' (What is a Gulf?, n.d.). Red Sea (and Gulf of Suez) has now two openings thanks to the modern Suez Canal. According to geographical criteria, a gulf with two exits would instead be a Strait, or possibly a sea if large enough. As a result, the Gulf of Aqaba might offer the best choice for such designation from the historic Arabian Gulf. Naming other two related bodies of water, as such, looks problematic; the Red Sea has no chance to be an Arabian sea because there is already one Arabian sea in the northern Indian Ocean. In relation to the

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Gulf of Suez, in addition to the mentioned problem (gulf's technical definition), this body of water is surrounded, only, by Egyptian lands; hence, the geography of the place dictates a name of the Egyptian national/local origin.

6. 2. Geographical Foundation

The Gulf of Aqaba is the only gulf, in the world, that is surrounded only by Arabian lands. Four Arab countries enclose this body of water; Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and historic Palestine (now Israel). It is also placed at the heart of the Arab world, not in its borders with non-Arab neighbours; the gulf of Aqaba is located beside Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula from the east, and beside historic Palestine and the Levant from the north, and beside Egypt and north Africa from the west. From a demographic perspective, all peoples who live around this gulf are Arab. In addition, Mecca and Medina, the central cities of historical Arab lands are located near this body of water.

In addition to the historical and geographical foundations of the proposed designation, there are other compelling arguments that equally support this suggestion:

6. 3. Countering the Zionist De-Arabization of the Region

A main de-Arabization operation is taking place in the region since the Zionist involvement in Palestine. Because of this involvement, the whole of historic Palestine has been occupied. A main Arab land has been removed from the map of the Arab world. One Arab nation, except a few, has been expelled from their homes in Palestine, and now live as refugees in neighbouring countries.

Arabian Palestine has been converted to a non-Arab Hebrew land called Israel; Jews from all over the world are gathered to fill the Arabs' place in the land. This Arab land is considered, now, the only occupied country in the world. The biggest ethnic cleansing operation on earth has been implemented in Palestine, and is taking place nowadays to get rid of the remained Arabs of the land (Pappe, 2006). What happened in Palestine since Balfour Declaration supports this assertion; If not, reading recently established the Nation-State Basic Law, adopted by the Israeli Knesset, might help; based on this law, Arabic has lost its status as an official language of the country; and only Jews have an exclusive right to determine the fate of this land, excluding its Arab citizens. Almost all Arabic names of the geographic features in the land, in that de-Arabization operation, have been converted to Hebrew names including the name of the Gulf of Aqaba.

All of this anti-Arab discrimination is occurring along the Gulf coastline (of Aqaba) in Israel. In addition to the broader issue concerning historic Palestine, there are specific challenges related to Israel's access to the Gulf, which, from this perspective, is doubly illegal. The southern region of Israel was occupied in 1949 when a UN ceasefire halted the 1948 war between Israel and the Arab countries. As per the international agreement, it was expected that conflicting troops would remain in their positions and refrain from advancing further while armistice negotiations to end the war were underway. However, in violation of this UN arrangement, Zionist troops proceeded to occupy the south of Palestine in an operation known as Uvda in order to gain access to the Gulf of Aqaba (Ben-Dror, 2012). Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN special mediator, was assassinated by Zionist terrorists following his peace proposal that allocated the southern region, An-Naqab, to the Arab

state (Stanger, 1988). Following the occupation, Israel demolished an Arab village on the Gulf coast called Umm Rashrash and eradicated it from the map, replacing it with a Jewish town now known as Eilat. The Israeli project of de-Arabization continues to persist in this southern region of Israel, where the majority of the inhabitants are still Arabs. The An-Naqab desert, along with the Al-Jalil region in the north, are the only two regions in historic Palestine that have largely remained Arabic from a demographic standpoint. However, Israel is actively working to alter this status as well. The Israeli government does not recognize Arab villages in the An-Naqab and seeks to expel them from their lands. These actions aim to displace Arabs from the region and establish a Jewish majority in this part of the land, mirroring efforts in other parts of historic Palestine.

Israeli anti-Arab policies extend beyond the confines of historic Palestine to impact other Arab nations in the surrounding region. The Sinai Peninsula, located on the western coast of the Gulf, has been subjected to Israeli occupation on two occasions - in 1956 and 1967. The most recent Israeli withdrawal from this peninsula imposed certain conditions that restrict Egyptian sovereign power in the area and place Israeli constraints on the administration of this coastal land, despite it belonging to the Arabs. Furthermore, in 1967, Israel occupied two Saudi islands, Tiran and Sanafir, and maintained control over them until the Egypt-Israel peace agreement. Although Israel's access to the Gulf is limited to a mere 10 kilometres, its mighty military capacity affords it a dominant role in this body of water. Consequently, Israel exercises significant influence and can impose its policies on other coastal Arab countries, as exemplified by its vehement opposition to the construction of a bridge over the Strait of Tiran - the point where

the Gulf connects to the Red Sea - between Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Middle East Monitor, 2014). The Israeli occupation of the northern coasts of the Gulf carries far-reaching implications that extend beyond the confines of a single Arabian territory, Palestine, and affect the entire Arab world. Its significance not only lies within the Gulf region but also resonates throughout all Arab countries; This occupation disrupts the territorial unity of the Arab world and creates a division between its western and eastern parts with no direct land connection.

6. 4. Countering the Zionist De-Arabization of the Gulf

The name of the Gulf originates from Aqaba, a town situated along its coast in Jordan. At the beginning of the 20th century, Aqaba was a small and unremarkable village (Al-ʿAqabah, 2011). Israel is actively attempting to change the name of the Gulf to the non-Arabic alternative, the Gulf of Eilat. Jordan, being a small country in the region and often referred to as a dwarf among giants, lacks the necessary resources to compete with Israel, which has more power and influence in the Western world. If left to the competition between Israel and Jordan alone, this battle will surely be lost to Israel. To successfully confront this policy of de-Arabization, it is imperative to have a united Arab stance. The naming of the Arabian Gulf could potentially serve as a unifying ground for such solidarity. This might provide the best opportunity to protect the Arabic character of the area from Israel's hostile and effective de-Arabization policies.

6. 5. Correcting a failed pro-Arab/pro-Palestinian Strategy

Changing the name of the Gulf, from Persian to Arabian, seemingly, had one overall goal; defending Arabs' rights in the region, Palestinians' in particular. If so, a wrong strategy might be adopted to advance it; how that naming shift served Arab and Palestinian rights? half of a century after that move, this critical question could be asked. This strategy (to defend Arabs) - if a bigger picture, of the whole ME, is taken - has diverted the Arab campaign against anti-Arab policies from Palestine, where a real massive Anti-Arab policy was taking place to a different direction; where no de-Arabization was happening when the Gulf was Persian, at least from this naming viewpoint. Arabs, themselves, used this name in their entire history. Persian Gulf naming was not, and is not regarded, an assault on Arabs' rights in the region. Nasser's campaign to punish a 'wrong relationship' with Israel (by changing the Gulf's name) opened an unnecessary (and dangerous) conflict with Persian neighbours. It weakened, as a result, the pro-Palestinian front of the region by creating a serious conflict between two Muslim pro-Palestinian populations of the region. From this perspective, the move could be regarded as a strategic failure, and if not corrected, will work and destroy the coming chances of Arab-Iranian cooperation, including in supporting the Arabs' rights in Palestine. It, also, opened an extra Arab confrontation with the international community where the Persian Gulf is used as the standard naming of the gulf. The move, after decades of costly campaigning, becomes a burden on Arab countries. Many international parties are not ready to use this designation unless Arab countries pay for it. The proposed solution, to come back to the historical Arabian Gulf, has the capacity to correct this historical mistake, and concentrate the pro-

Arab campaign on a front where a real de-Arabization policy functions.

7. Conclusion

This article tackles a critical issue in the Middle East. The relations between Arabs and Iranians have worsened over the past few decades due to a nationalist movement among Arabs to change the name of the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Gulf. This historic manoeuvre has sparked a genuine dispute, not only between the Iranian government and its Arab counterparts, but also between the Arab and Persian nations, who are major populations in the region. The deeply rooted social division around this matter prevents either side - Arab or Iranian - from backing down from their popular stance. Unfortunately, the ordinary people on both sides are largely unaware of the destructive consequences of this situation, and yet they bear the brunt of it, risking their lives and livelihoods. Unless a solution capable of rectifying the problem emerges, this unfortunate state of affairs will continue forever. Nobody knows how much more the region will suffer in terms of lives lost and resources depleted before reaching that tipping point. Several solutions have already been proposed but, regrettably, none have made a significant impact. This article presents another proposition: restoring the historical name of the Arabian Gulf. By adopting this solution, the Middle East can acknowledge both the Persian and Arabian Gulf in their rightful historical positions. Extensive historical evidence from both Arab and Iranian sources fully supports this designation. Moreover, this solution is solidly grounded in geography, further bolstering its credibility. By adopting this approach, two regional problems can be simultaneously addressed: mitigating the destructive tension

between Arabs and Iranians, allowing for the possibility of forging a new chapter in their relationship, and relocating a pro-Arab nationalist campaign from a strategic quagmire to a realm where a genuine de-Arabization effort is underway, namely historic Palestine. Such a transformation could potentially offer Iran an opportunity to shift its regional role from being perceived as an 'anti-Arab player' to that of a 'friendlier neighbour'.

To wrap up this humble piece of writing, I'd like to share a powerful quote by Professor Shlomo Sand from the preface of the English-language edition of his renowned and thought-provoking book, 'The Invention of the Jewish People'. Professor Sand concludes his preface with these inspiring words: 'I don't think books can change the world, but when the world begins to change, it searches for different books. I may be naive, but it is my hope that the present work will be one of them' (Sand, 2010).

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