



May 20, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write to express our concern and dismay over your use of the inflammatory and inaccurate term “Arabian Gulf” rather than the historically accepted term, Persian Gulf, to describe the body of water between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula in a speech before the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

The term “Persian Gulf” is the legally acknowledged, apolitical, and internationally recognized name for this body of water. The United Nations and the United States’ Board of Geographic Names acknowledge the legitimacy of the term “Persian Gulf,” which has been widely used for more than two millennia.

The origin of the term “Arabian Gulf” dates to the 20th century and propaganda efforts by pan-Arab leaders to stoke ethnic tensions in the region and unify Arabs against Iranians, Israelis, and other non-Arabs in the Middle East. Saddam Hussein later co-opted the term to exploit ethnic rivalries in support of his regional claims and territorial ambitions, including his invasion of Iran and his campaigns against Iraqi Kurds. Later, Osama Bin Laden adopted the term in an attempt to stir ethnic rivalries to bolster his appeal among Arab populations.

Clearly, this is a term that should not be used by the President of the United States, or any government branch or military service. The last thing the United States should be doing today is fanning the flames of sectarianism in the region if your Administration seeks peace, stability, and compromise in the Middle East.

The use of this term comes at a critical time as you seek to reset policy toward Iran and restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Until yesterday, Donald Trump had been the first and only President to use the term “Arabian Gulf,” doing so as part of his statements announcing his withdrawal from the nuclear deal. At the time, it was deemed an insult and sparked trending hashtags from Iranians in and outside the country.



We commend your efforts to reengage Iran, including by seeking to restore the JCPOA on a compliance-for-compliance basis and secure freedom for American citizens who are being unjustly imprisoned within the country. However, we strongly object to your use of the ethnically-divisive term the “Arabian Gulf,” which serves no purpose other than to stoke tensions along ethnic lines. We urge you to be cognizant of this issue and to ensure that your Administration uses the correct term - the Persian Gulf - when referring to the body of water, and directs the entirety of the federal government and armed services to do so as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamal Abdi".

Jamal Abdi
President, National Iranian American Council