



By: TA | AP Insight

# Did the US underestimate the risk to its Gulf Arab allies?



The Trump administration is confronting mounting discontent from allies in the Persian Gulf who have complained they were not given adequate time to prepare for the torrent of **Iranian drones and missiles bombarding** their countries in retaliation for strikes launched by the U.S. and Israel.

Officials from two Gulf countries said their governments were disappointed in the way the U.S. has handled the war, particularly the initial attack on Iran on Feb. 28.

They said their countries were not given advance notice of the U.S.-Israeli attack and complained the U.S. had ignored their warnings that the war would have devastating consequences for the entire region.

One of the officials said that Gulf countries were frustrated and even angry that the **U.S. military has not defended** them enough.

He said there is belief in the region that the operation has focused on defending Israel and American troops, while leaving Gulf countries to protect themselves, and said that his country's stock of interceptors was "rapidly depleting."

Like others in this story, the Gulf officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were discussing a confidential diplomatic matter.

The governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates did not respond to requests for comment.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said in response: "Iran's retaliatory ballistic missile attacks have decreased by 90% because Operation Epic Fury is crushing their ability to shoot these weapons or produce more. President Trump is in close contact with all of our regional partners, and the terrorist Iranian regime's attacks on its neighbors prove how imperative it was that President Trump eliminate this threat to our country and our allies."

The Pentagon did not respond.

## Netanyahu's war

Official reactions by the Gulf Arab countries have been muted, but public figures with close ties to their governments have been openly critical of the U.S., suggesting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dragged President Donald Trump into a needless war.

"This is Netanyahu's war," Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief, told CNN on Wednesday. "He somehow convinced the president (Trump) to support his views."

Pentagon officials conceded this week in closed-door briefings with lawmakers they are struggling to stop waves of drones launched by Iran, leaving some U.S. targets in the Gulf region, including troops, vulnerable.

The Gulf countries have emerged as valuable targets for Iran, well within the range of Iran's short-range missiles and filled with targets, including American troops, high-profile business and tourist locations and energy facilities, disrupting the world's flow of oil.

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Since the start of the war, Iran has fired at least 380 missiles and over 1,480 drones targeting the five Arab Gulf countries, according to an AP tally based on official statements. At least 13 people have been killed in those countries, according to local officials.

In addition, **six U.S. soldiers were killed** in Kuwait on Sunday when an Iranian drone strike hit an operations center in a civilian port, more than 10 miles from the main Army base.

The husband of one of the slain soldiers, who was part of a **supply and logistics unit** based in

Iowa, said the operations center was a shipping container-style building and had no defenses.

## Drone attacks

In briefings for members of Congress on Tuesday, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers that the U.S. will not be able to intercept many of the incoming UAVs, especially the Shaheds, according to three people familiar with the briefings.

In one of the briefings, Caine and Hegseth did not offer any details when pressed by lawmakers why the U.S. did not seem prepared for Iran to launch waves of drones at U.S. targets in the region, according to one of the people.

That person, a U.S. official who is familiar with the U.S. security posture in Gulf region, said that the U.S. did not have widespread capabilities throughout the Gulf region to effectively counter waves of the one-way drones coming to places outside conventional targets or bases outside of Iraq and Syria.

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Drone attacks this week at the embassy in Saudi Arabia caused a limited fire at the embassy in Riyadh, and another drone attack the United Arab Emirates sparked a small fire outside the U.S. consulate in Dubai.

The U.S. and its allies in the Middle East on Thursday even **sought help from Ukraine**, which has expertise in countering Iran's Shahed drones, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

When asked about Zelenskyy's comments, Trump told Reuters on Thursday, "Certainly,

I'll take, you know, any assistance from any country."

## The U.S. underestimated the risk to its Gulf Arab allies

Bader Mousa Al-Saif, a Kuwait-based analyst with Chatham House, said the U.S. appeared to have underestimated the risk to its Gulf Arab allies, believing American troops and Israel would be the primary targets of Iranian retaliation.

"I don't think they saw that there would be as much exposure to the Gulf," he said, saying the lack of a plan to protect the Gulf countries "speaks to U.S. short-sightedness."



*These attacks will leave long-term enmity, and if they keep up, the Gulf Arabs may start attacking Iran - Elliott Abrams*

The frustration in some of the Gulf nations is driven in part by the relative success that Israel has had knocking down drones and missiles compared to some of their neighbors, according to a person familiar with the sensitive diplomatic matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Their air defense systems are hardly as robust as Israel's, but according to the person, U.S. officials have been somewhat perplexed that the Gulf countries are still not showing an appetite for delivering a counteroffensive by launching missiles at Iranian targets.

Elliott Abrams, who served as a special representative for Iran and Venezuela at the

end of Trump's first term, said that U.S. national security officials and their Gulf allies were aware that Iran had the capability to carry out significant strikes.

"And the neighbors knew it and were afraid of it. But it was never clear that Iran would actually do it, because they have a lot to lose," Abrams said. "These attacks will leave long-term enmity, and if they keep up, the Gulf Arabs may start attacking Iran."

Michael Ratney, a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, said that while the Gulf countries have an interest in seeing Iran weakened, they also have key concerns about the ongoing war – including the economic damage and instability it is causing and its open-ended nature.

Ratney, who is now a senior adviser in the Middle East program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said: "What comes next? The countries of the Gulf will have to bear the brunt of whatever that is."