

## **Highlights on the seawater's geographical names of the Gulf Co-Operation Council**

Saif Al-Qaydi

(Associate Professor)

Unit of Government, Policies and Urban Planning,  
UAE Univeristy, P. O. Box 17771, Al-Ain, UAE

E-Mail: [alqaydi@uaeu.ac.ae](mailto:alqaydi@uaeu.ac.ae)

### Abstract

This article sheds some highlights on the nomenclature of the main seawater names of the GCC countries. Information on seawater and geographical names used in this article are based on the researcher's findings which are driven from official documentations and other reliable sources. Data presented in this article are driven from some international encyclopedias and directly gathered from professional geographers in the GCC countries gathered in a professional meeting in Kuwait City on March 26-29 2007.

### General Background on the GCC Countries

The Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC) was established on May 25 /1981 and is composed of six countries; Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These countries are engaged in a gradual process of creating a unified legislation to better serve their people. For example, in 2002 the custom tariff by laws came in implementation and they are expecting to reach the unified currency by the year 2010.

The GCC countries strategically lie on five main seawater frontiers; Red Sea, Arab Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aqaba and the Arabian Gulf (Figure: 1). These four main water outlets have served these countries in the past as well as in the present. In the past, most of the area's trading routes came throughout these

waters; nowadays these countries use these waters for many other purposes. Trade, tourism and services are among the main economic sectors which benefit from these water outlets. The water frontiers vary from country to another in the GCC region. All countries, except Kuwait, are located on more than one body of water. The location of these seawaters provides GCC countries more freedom in terms of labor mobility and trading with the rest of the world.

At the main time, Strait of Hurmoz is considered as a major gateway to the GCC oil exportation industry and the only connection between the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.



Figure 1: Gulf Co-Operation Council Countries

The GCC countries cover an area of 2,6 million square Kilometers, with a total population of 33,5 million people. Saudi Arabia covers more than 83.5% of the total GCC land (Table: 1). In 2004, the GCC' GNP was more than 476 Million US Dollars, with an annual income of 14,204 US Dollars per capita<sup>7)</sup>.

The following parts discuss the main seawaters in the GCC region, with some highlights on their geographical characteristics, their relation to GCC countries, and their locational advantages.

7) [http://www.gcc-sg.org/home\\_e.ht](http://www.gcc-sg.org/home_e.ht)

Table: 1 Area and Water Location of the GCC Countries

Country	Area (Square KM)	Water Location
Bahrain	669	Gulf of Bahrain, Arabian Gulf
Kuwait	17,818	Arabian Gulf
Oman	320,000	Oman Gulf, Arabian Gulf, Arabia See
Qatar	11,000	Arabian Gulf, Bahrain Gulf
Saudi Arabia	2,200,000	Red Sea, Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Bahrain
UAE	83,600	Arabian Gulf and Oman Gulf
Total	2,633,087	

### Gulf Of Bahrain خليج البحرين

Gulf Of Bahrain is the water surrounding the southern part of the Bahrain Peninsula facing the East Region of the Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Figure: 2). It is a small body of water which spreads from Duhat Salwa in Saudi Arabia in the south to the northern coastal area of Bahrain. Some of the old maps, as well as the new ones are using this name as a reference to the water surrounding the southern territories of Bahrain. For example, (Hamada Al-Jasir, 1979) had mentioned this name in his gazetteer about the Eastern Region of the Saudi Arabia<sup>8</sup>). Also, the CIA Fact Book 2007 included the Gulf of Bahrain map in their web site. Out of a total of 160 Km coastal line of Bahrain, only a small portion of the south is bordered by the Gulf of Bahrain water facing Qatar to the east and the eastern part of the Saudi Arabia in the south<sup>9</sup>).



Figure: 2  
Gulf of Bahrain  
(Source: CIA Fact book, 2007)

8) Hamad Al-Jasir.(1979) Al-Muajam al-Gugrafi Gazetteer).Riyadh: Dar Al-Yamama for press, p. 32-33

9) <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ba.htm>

## Red Sea البحر الأحمر

The Red Sea is an old sea in which Saudi Arabia is the only GCC country that lies on it. Some believe that the name of the Red Sea is attributed to a marine environment phenomenon, where during the summer a type of marine weeds creates some sort of red foam. Others believe that the name came from the Roman Mer Rovge, as it indicated in the 1667 Jollain' map.

The total area of the Red Sea is estimated to exceed 447,744 square kilometers, its largest width reaching 350 Km, and an average depth of 538 meters<sup>10</sup>.

As mentioned before, Saudi Arabia lies on this sea with total coastal line of approximately 1200 Km in length, stretching from its borders with Jordan in the north, to its borders with Yemen in the south (Figure:3). Saudi Arabia cities, such as Jeddah and Yanbu benefit from its water. Access to the Red Sea and to the Arabian Gulf waters, provides Saudi Arabia a locational advantage which consists of reaching international markets.



Figure: 3  
The Red Sea

10) Al-Ufiq. (1999) Information of 1997/1998. London: United Horizons International Ltd. P. 921.

### Gulf of Oman خليج عمان

The Gulf of Oman is the only entrance to the Arabian Gulf from the Indian Ocean. Also, it is the border of the Arabian Sea, between Iran and the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Gulf of Oman' water is shallow and expands 370 Km between Cape Al-Hadd in Oman and Gwadar Bay on the Pakistan-Iran border. It is about 560 Km long and 56 Km in width at the Strait of Hormuz (Figure: 4).



Figure: 4  
Gulf of Oman

The total Omani coastal line lies on this Gulf is over 400 Km in length, stretching from Khitmat Milaha in the north to the city of Sur in the south. The importance of the Gulf of Oman consists of its connection with the Arabian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, where roughly one-third of the world's oil is exported through its waters<sup>11)</sup>. Massqat, Suhar and Sur are considered the main Omani cities that benefit from this water. On the UAE border, the coastal line expands 90 Km from its northern borders with Oman (Dibba) to the south in Khor Kalba. So, the UAE and Oman have the advantage of accessing international waters through the Ulf of Oman as well as the Arabian Gulf.

### Arabian Sea بحر العرب

Its water is part of the Indian Ocean and lies between the Arabian Peninsula and India. Ancient sources indicate that the Arabian Sea used to be known as

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11) [www.answers.com/topic/gulf-of-oman](http://www.answers.com/topic/gulf-of-oman).- Also, [www.britannica.com/eb/artil-9057077/gulf-of-oma](http://www.britannica.com/eb/artil-9057077/gulf-of-oma)

Mare Erythraeum, The Arabian Sea extends from the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aden in the southeast to the Gulf of Oman in the north. Aden (Yemen), Karachi (Pakistan) and Mumbai (India) consider the Arabian Sea as the main trade seaports. Oman is the only GCC country which lies on this water (Figure: 5). Arabian Sea coastal line spreads on 1100 Km from Ras Dharbit Ali at the Omani -Yemeni borders in the south to Ras al-Had in the north.

It has an area of 3,862,000 square Km with an average depth of 2,734 meter. The importance of its water comes from the fact that it is an essential trading route between the Indian Sub-Continent and the Far East from one side and the GCC countries and the Africa East Coast on the other side.



Figure: 5  
Arabian Sea

### المحيط الهندي Indian Ocean

With an area of about 74 million square Kilometer and an average depth of 3,898 meter, the Indian Ocean is considered the third largest ocean in the world. Its water merges with the five main GCC seawaters; Gulf of Oman, Arabian Gulf, Aqaba Gulf, Arabian Sea and the Red Sea (Figure: 6).

Historically, the Indian Ocean is one of the main old trading routes in the area. The Arab, Indian, and Chinese used its waters for their trading journeys from the East to the West. The significance of the Indian Ocean is augmented after the construction of Suwaiz Canal in 1869 which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea<sup>12)</sup>.

12) Al-mawsuah Al-Arabiyah Al-Alamiyyah (1996).Arab International Encyclopedia. Riyadh: Muasasat Aamalal-Mawsuah linashir Wa Attawjia

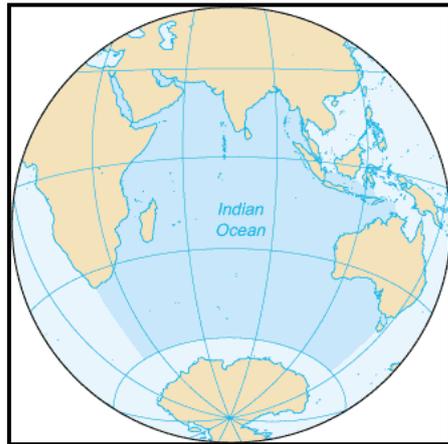


Figure: 6  
The Indian  
Ocean

الخليج العربي Arabian Gulf

The Arabian Gulf is an arm of the Indian Ocean which separates Iran from the GCC countries. It extends on an area of 240,000 square Km and a maximum depth of 90 meters. Its water is considered relatively shallow with an average depth of 50 meters, and salt level is as high as 40% due to high evaporation with less fresh water supply. The Arabian Gulf water is about 1,000 Km in length and a width of about 370 Km. The northern part of the Arabian Gulf is mountainous (Iran), while the southern part (GCC and Iraq) is a flat area. Several GCC countries lie on its waters (Figure: 7). The UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have the longest sea water frontiers if compared with the other GCC countries. Oman has a short costal line of about 100 Km on the Arabian Gulf, from Massandam Peninsula in the North to the UAE-Oman borders in the south. Generally speaking, Qatar has around 650 Km coastal line on the Arabian Gulf. UAE coastal line spread over 640 Km from Sha'am in the north to its border with Qatar and Saudi Arabia in the south.

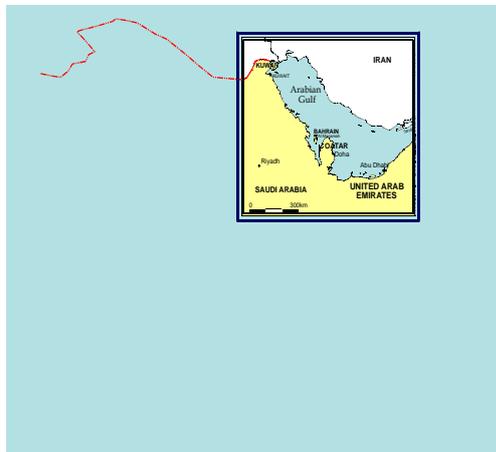


Figure: 7  
The Arabian  
Gulf

The Arabian Gulf is also known by several other names e.g. Basra Sea, the Gulf and Persian Gulf. Some of these names are still in use by different parties. Several old and new maps vendors are still using more than one name for this water. For example, Jollian calls the Arabian Gulf by the name of Seut Arabique in his map drawn in 1667 (Figure: 8).



Figure: 8 Jollian Map of the Middle East on 1667

(Source: [http://www.helmink.com/Antique\\_Map\\_Jollain\\_Middle\\_East](http://www.helmink.com/Antique_Map_Jollain_Middle_East)  
 Maker: Jollain Titel: l'Empire des Turcs Place Issued: Paris Date: 1667)

### Gulf of Aqaba خليج العقبة

The Gulf of Aqaba is an extension of the Red Sea. Its water spread from the east of the Strait of Tiran to the Aqaba city in Jordan. The gulf is 160 km in length and a maximum 24 Km in width<sup>13)</sup> (Figure: 9). It's water spread from Ras Ashiekh Humayd in the south to the Saudi Arabia –Jordan borders in the

13) Aqaba, Gulf of. (2007). In Encyclopædia Britannica Retrieved March 30, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-900811>  
[http://lexicorient.com/e.o/aqaba\\_gl.ht](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/aqaba_gl.ht)

north<sup>14</sup>). The Gulf of Aqaba's water separates Saudi Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula. Haql is the main city of Saudi Arabia which is located on this gulf. The Gulf of Aqaba is considered the main outlet water stream to Jordan to the international waters.

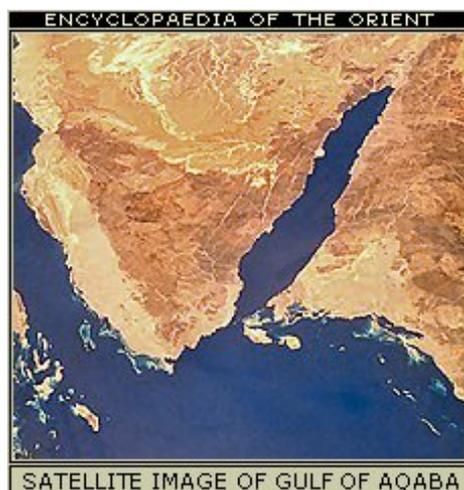


Figure: 9

Gulf of Aqaba

(Source: [http://lexicorient.com/e.o/aqaba\\_gl.htm](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/aqaba_gl.htm))

#### Other GCC Seawater Names

Beside the previous mentioned seawater names in the GCC countries, there are some waters, which are not well known to the world, but some local fishermen and pearl divers gave several names to some parts of the Arabian Gulf' waters. The following are some of these seawater names which are used in some of the GCC countries.

#### Bahr Al-Banat (Girls' Sea) بحر البنات

This sea is located in Kuwait territories. As the Kuwaiti's have been well known for their pearl diving industry during the first quarter of the last century, this name was used during that period of time and they referred to it as the place where only small pearl diving ships can find pearl in its water<sup>15</sup>). Its water is rather shallow and its depth ranges between 10-30 meters. Beside this name, there are several geographical locations referred to as places for pearl diving in

14) Farsi, Zaki (1989). National Guide and Atlas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Jeddah: Al-Madina Printing and Press.

15) Falih Handhal (1984). MUajam Al-Ghus Wa al-Hualu fi al-Khalij Al-Arabi."Pearl Diving dictionary of the Arabian Gulf".Abu Dhabi: dar Al-Fikr al-Jadid Littebaa wa al-Nashir. p. 73

the GCC countries. Table: 2 indicates some of these names and their geographical coordinates.

Table: 2 Example of Pear diving  
geographical Names in the GCC waters

Arabic Names	English	Longitudes	Latitudes
خور بن نصار	Khur Bin Nassar	50-51	26-27
خور بن حاكول	Khur Bin Hakul	50-51	26-27
خور الغزرة	Khur Al-Qhizra	50-51	26-27
خور زركوه	Khor Zarkuh	53-54	24-25
خورة	Kura	50-51	26-27

(Source: Falih Handhal. Muajam Al-Qhus Wa al-lualu fi al-Khalij Al-Arabi. "Pearl Diving dictionary of the Arabian Gulf". Abu Dhabi: dar Al-Fikr al-Jadid Littebaa waal-Nashir, 1984. P. 150-151)

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[www.answers.com/topic/gulf-of-oman.-2](http://www.answers.com/topic/gulf-of-oman.-2)

[www.britannica.com/eb/artil-9057077/gulf-of-oman](http://www.britannica.com/eb/artil-9057077/gulf-of-oman)