

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee
Statement Regarding the US Board on Geographic Names' Decision on the Name 'Persian Gulf'

The US Board on Geographic Names (US BGN) is aware of regional and national sensitivities associated with the name of this geographic feature, and with similar toponymic issues in many parts of the world. The basis for the US BGN's decision on the name 'Persian Gulf' rests on two of the Board's policies covering the selection of standard names in areas outside of the United States.

The first policy addresses selection of standard names for high seas features, i.e., bodies of water and maritime features that contain area beyond the sovereignty of a single nation. Board policy¹ states that a single conventional name, if one exists, will be chosen as the standard name for such features for official use in US Government publications.

The second policy covers the selection of a conventional name, defined as an English-language name in widespread and current usage. Qualification of an English-language name under the criterion of "widespread and current usage" is determined by consulting, among other sources, the latest editions of the various print and online English-language geographic references.

In applying these policies to the case of the subject high seas feature, the Board's Foreign Names Committee has determined that the longstanding BGN-approved name 'Persian Gulf' is still the appropriate standard name for use in official US Government publications.

In 1993 the BGN Foreign Names Committee did not approve a proposal from US Central Command to change the name 'Persian Gulf' to 'Arabian Gulf.'

Use of the term 'Arabian Gulf' is acceptable when communicating informally with Arabic-speaking military and government partners in the region. This name may also be used in internal memoranda and other communications not destined for a public audience. If the name 'Arabian Gulf' is used in internal-use graphics the following disclaimer should be included:

"'Persian Gulf' is the name approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names for the water body labeled 'Arabian Gulf' on this graphic."

However, in comments to the press, and in maps and reports reflecting the U.S. Government positions, policy dictates use of the BGN-approved name 'Persian Gulf' only.

¹ Maritime Features policy approved 29 November 2005