

United States Board on Geographic Names  
Foreign Names Committee  
Statement Regarding the Name ‘Persian Gulf’

The United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) is aware of regional and national sensitivities associated with the name of this geographic feature, and with similar toponymic issues in other parts of the world. The basis for the 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 policy<sup>1</sup> states that a single conventional name, if one exists, will be chosen as the standard name for such features for official use in U.S. 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 U.S. Government publications.

In 1993, the Foreign Names Committee rejected a proposal from U.S. 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. In comments to the press, and in maps and reports reflecting the U.S. Government positions, including any products for use across U.S. Government agencies or departments, policy dictates use of the BGN-approved name ‘Persian Gulf’ only.

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<sup>1</sup> Names of Maritime Features policy approved November 29, 2005