

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL | www.timesofisrael.com

The Persian Gulf Sanction Busters

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Glen Segell is Fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran & Persian Gulf Studies, University of Haifa.

I accept that money is more important than politics and religion for not only the average man who needs to provide sustenance for his family and himself but also for states that need to care for residents. I acknowledge the reality that money is also the prime interest of those that conduct business without which they would have no livelihood not to mention the criminal elements in society.

Herein lies the weakness of any sanctions or embargoes imposed by one or more states or even the entire international community upon another state. The cause may be just but there will always be those that cannot or won't adhere because they need to provide sustenance, take care of, conduct their livelihood or are criminal. Naturally the state upon whom the sanctions or embargoes are imposed will try its utmost to find and even entice these so that business can continue as normal.

More often than not it is neighbouring states and their residents that have the greatest propensity to break the sanctions in the name of their own interests even if they are high on the list of those that would benefit the most should the sanctions succeed. This is even if they are the victims that provoked the necessity for the sanctions. Such is the theory and notion.

If tested in the Persian Gulf and Iran the theory and notion proves accurate. There is robust financial and economic ties between Persian Gulf States and their Iranian nemesis. They are neighbouring states and their residents conduct trade daily. These will not be severed with the imposition of American sanctions even if Iran is their main threat.

However should these economic and trading relations be severed then the probability of the sanctions succeeding would be greatly enhanced. Herein lies the dichotomy. The Persian Gulf States need to weigh the options and realise that economic dealings must be in line with their anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'ite rhetoric. To be blunt I would say to them that they should put their money where their mouth is.

In not doing so this highlights the true dilemma of the situation. Perhaps it is just rhetoric. Perhaps the Persian Gulf States deep down are willing to live with a nuclear and threatening revolutionary Iran. Thinking through this dilemma shows some interesting points. The Persian Gulf States procure US military hardware apparently to defend against their biggest threat and this is Iran. Yet they have shown no interest in even demonstrating force to make Iran aware of the consequences should the Iranian Ayatollah entertain existential threats against their sovereignty or their Sunni brand of Islam. Moreover they persist in robust economic and trade partners with the regime that threatens them most, Iran.

I suggest that the United States should pressurise Persian Gulf States more so than European states and companies for not backing and adhering to sanctions against Iran. For these Persian Gulf states, not to curtail economic and trade ties with Iran at this juncture is not only a matter of being hypocritical and practising "a penny saved, a pound foolish," it might run the true possibility of losing their kingdoms and Sunni brand of Islam altogether.