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Commentary

Resilience & Restraint: The Gulf amid the Iran War

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On the 28th of February 2026, the ever-peaceful skies of the Gulf were invaded by a cowardly act of unjustified 'retaliation' from Iran. While shocked, people remained cautious and interpreted the attack as aimed at the United States' bases, citing the previous 'retaliation' on Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base last year. This view was soon challenged by the endless barrage of missiles and drones aimed at the Gulf countries' congested civilian areas and major energy facilities. Realization dawned quickly and loudly; Iran was aiming to debilitate its neighbors by striking major infrastructure at an unprecedented rate. So far, the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) air defenses have detected over 1,700 missiles and drones and lost two of its brave soldiers in the line of duty.

Shocking as it has been to experience this attack, the fact remains that the region's political climate was simmering for some time and would inevitably reach a boiling point. Dr Anwar Gargash, Diplomatic Adviser to the UAE President, recently explained that the UAE had been aware for months that the region was heading toward a crisis. "Once we saw that the negotiations had failed, we knew the drums of war had begun to beat," he said, describing the failed US-Iranian nuclear talks. Notably, the Arab Gulf states had played a pivotal role in the US-Iran nuclear negotiations. The UAE has focused extensively on addressing regional threats and lobbying to prevent military escalation.

Nevertheless, Iranian missiles were being aimed at countries that have continuously sought to diffuse escalation, and kicking the hornet's nest was both a flawed and reckless decision that has left the Gulf states bearing the brunt of a war they strove for years to avoid. Iran's response, by attacking the Gulf, is both baseless and unjustified. Gulf countries have worked around a regime that is both extremist in its governance and unpredictable in its diplomacy. Their understanding of the great repercussions of tipping power balances in the region has seen the bloc not only coexisting with its volatile neighbor but also creating flourishing economic systems.

The UAE's foreign policy has strived to advance peace and tolerance throughout the region and its position remains the same. It stands today after more than twelve days of relentless bombardment, alert and in control, defying calls to be swept into this reckless war. Resilience is evident in the UAE's restraint while it reserves its right to respond to safeguard its sovereignty. Meanwhile, the attitude on the ground remains composed in a country, which is home to more than 200 nationalities. Despite frenzied media coverage, particularly from Western outlets, our communities remain resilient. As missiles continue to be intercepted, initiatives like the 'Edge of Life' campaign, launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to rescue five million children from hunger continue. This spirit of perseverance was also echoed by the UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan during a hospital visit to patients who were

injured in the attacks, where he emphasized that the country will emerge stronger than before. Already in the 2009 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the unprecedented flooding of 2024, the UAE's model has been tested. The UAE has learned from these crises, adapting along the way, and it will undoubtedly do so again.

About the Author

Aysha Taryam is a socio-political commentator whose work examines the intersections of culture, politics, and public discourse in the Arab world. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Gulf Today* Newspaper.

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