

Commentary

Shared Threats, Shared Responsibility: Europe & the Gulf

HE Maria Belovas

Iran's attacks against Gulf states, including threats to civilians and civilian infrastructure, must be condemned clearly and without hesitation. No country should have to live under the shadow of missile and drone attacks targeting its sovereignty, its people, or the systems that sustain daily life. Estonia quickly and unequivocally condemned Iran's inexcusable attacks. It stands in full solidarity with the countries affected, and supports their right to defend their sovereignty.

This is where any honest discussion of regional security must begin.

Iran's destabilizing role does not stop at a single border or conflict. Its attacks against countries in the region, its nuclear and missile programs, and its support for armed proxies form part of a broader threat to both regional and global stability. For the Gulf, this threat is immediate and close to home. For Europe, it has been a longstanding strategic problem.

Ukraine has reinforced that connection even further. For more than four years, Ukrainians have lived through a full-scale war in which drones, missiles, and attacks on civilian infrastructure have become instruments of pressure and terror. Iran's support for Russia's war of aggression has underlined what Gulf countries have long known from their own experience: the same methods, the same networks, and the same disregard for civilian life can destabilize entire regions.

That is why the parallel matters. It is not to compare suffering, but to underline shared security realities. Gulf countries understand the threats to airports, ports, energy facilities, and other essential infrastructure. Ukraine knows it as well, and Europe is dealing with the consequences on its own continent. This shared experience creates a stronger basis for practical cooperation on air defense, maritime security, resilience, and the growing importance of counter-drone capabilities. Ukraine, by sharing its expertise even while facing a brutal and relentless war of aggression from Russia, has demonstrated its role as a central security and defense actor. As President Zelenskyy said last week, highlighting the interlinkages between Iran and Russia: "We do not believe we have the right to be indifferent."

Estonia has consistently condemned Iran's violent repression of its own people, its support for Russia's war against Ukraine, and its unjustified attacks against countries in this region. We support sustained diplomatic pressure and strong international measures to curb the threats posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions, missile programs, and support for violent proxies. We also support efforts that strengthen maritime security and freedom of navigation, both of which are vital to the Gulf and to the wider international economy. That position was reflected again in the 19 March joint statement on the Strait of Hormuz, which Estonia joined together with European, Gulf, and other partners, condemning attacks on commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure and

reaffirming the importance of safe passage and international law.

Europe's support for the Gulf is therefore not symbolic. It is visible in sanctions, diplomatic coordination, maritime engagement, and closer dialogue with regional partners. It is also visible in quieter but no less important moments of cooperation, including recent efforts to help repatriate citizens caught up in regional instability. These are practical reminders that Europe and the Gulf are not merely watching the same crises unfold. We are responding to them together.

At the same time, the focus on Iran must not come at the expense of the wider region. The situation in Gaza and the West Bank remains deeply alarming. Civilian protection cannot be defended selectively, and Lebanon too requires continued support. A more stable Middle East will require sustained engagement across all these fronts.

For Estonia, the conclusion is straightforward: our futures are intertwined. Stability in the Gulf is a strategic interest for Europe, just as stability in Europe matters to the Gulf. The same forces that threaten security in one region are helping drive instability in the other. That is why Europe's support for the Gulf is grounded in solidarity, but also in something more enduring: shared interests, shared risks, and shared responsibility.

This shared understanding should continue to shape how Europe and the Gulf stand by one another in the future, including in moments when the same principles are tested beyond this region. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, protection of civilians, and respect for international law cannot be defended selectively. The Gulf has long understood the nature of this threat. Europe has stood with its partners in addressing it. Today, that partnership matters more than ever.

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