Iranian Studies Group at MIT
Factsheet on the Legal and Historical Usage of the “Persian Gulf”

International Legal Standards

The Group of Experts on Geographical Names was set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in pursuance of the Economic and Social Council resolution 715 A (XXVII) of 23 April 1959, and has endorsed “Persian Gulf” as the official name of the body of water.


The United Nations Oceans and Law of the Sea Office uses only the term Persian Gulf in its legal documents.

U.S. Government Designation

A decision by the State Department's Board of Geographical Names in 1917 makes the “Persian Gulf” the only acceptable label for that body of water.

Historical Maps of the Region

Starting from the earliest maps, the body of water has been called Persian Gulf by European sources. Among the first Atlases in the world is that of Jean Baptiste Anville, 1751. This map of western Asia shows the body of water labeled as “Golfe Persique” or Persian Gulf. Other major maps dating back to the 18th and 19th century are presented in Appendix 1. (Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, http://www.davidrumsey.com/index.html)
Appendix - Major Maps indicating Persian Gulf as the name for the body of water
Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection http://www.davidrumsey.com/view.html