

III. Canada and the Gulf

Perceptions of Canada:

Perceptions of Canada are important. They are important because they can be a determining factor among potential diplomatic and business partners in pursuing relations with Canada. Canada must promote its interests in a competitive international environment, and this is certainly the case in the Arabic-speaking and Islamic world.

Based on the interviews conducted with policy influencers in the subject countries Canada enjoys a positive image. We are frequently seen as bringing an "independent" perspective to international relations. In general, we are seen as being "different" from the United States, but most interviewees are unable to really define these differences. Although generally regarded positively, frequently little is known about our domestic policies and values. To enhance our image in the region, it is clear that a more concentrated effort is needed, through, for example, more systematic use of the local media and development of public affairs events to build a stronger Canadian profile.

Canadian Interests:

Since the events of September 11th, the international campaign against terrorism has become an important addition to the traditional Canadian interests in Moslem countries. Major terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda have based their headquarters and fund-raising in Islamic countries, and received varying degrees of support from different sectors of the elites and general populations. From a geo-strategic perspective, the Middle East and the Gulf have been the scene of major armed conflicts during the last three decades: the Arab-Israeli dispute, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. Political instability and armed conflict in the region have implications far outside of the region, and remain an important foreign policy concern for Canada.

Although trade is the focus of our bilateral relations with the Gulf, a number of factors are often over-looked in our analysis of the political significance of the region. Relatively small in population compared to major Islamic countries such as Indonesia and Egypt, the Gulf countries, and especially Saudi Arabia, never the less exert significant influence throughout the Islamic world. The Gulf States have significant business holdings in neighbouring regions, and are a major source of investment in throughout the world economy. The region attracts hundreds of thousands of foreign workers, with Egyptians, Indians, Pakistanis and Philipinos among the largest foreign communities. In many of the smaller Gulf states, such as Kuwait and the UAE, the population of foreign workers far exceeds that of national citizens. For example, in both Kuwait and Qatar, about two-thirds of these countries' residents are foreign nationals.