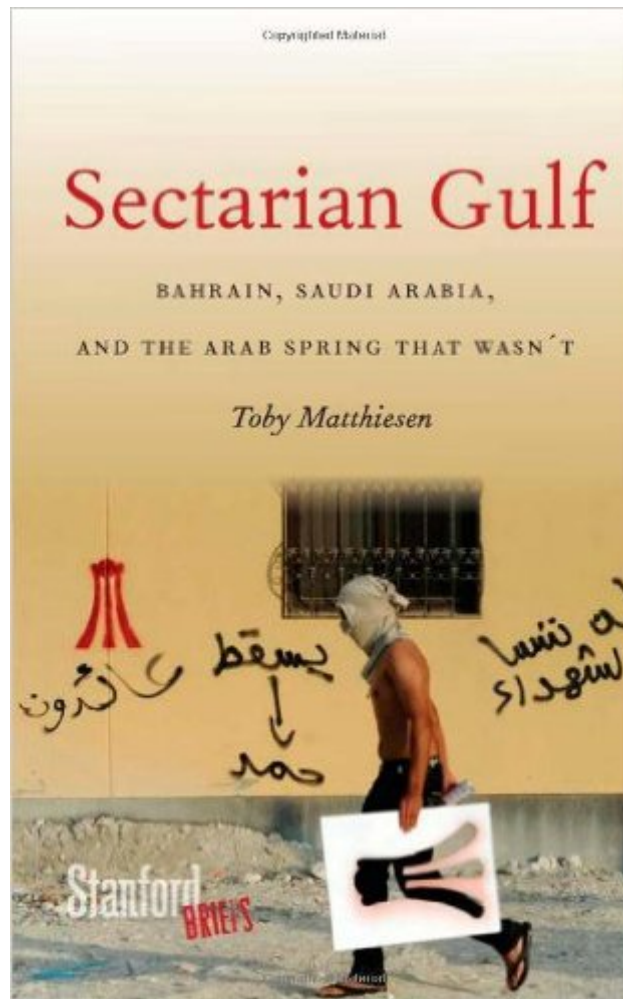


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Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, And The Arab Spring That Wasn't (Stanford Briefs)



Synopsis

As popular uprisings spread across the Middle East, popular wisdom often held that the Gulf States would remain beyond the fray. In *Sectarian Gulf*, Toby Matthiesen paints a very different picture, offering the first assessment of the Arab Spring across the region. With first-hand accounts of events in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, Matthiesen tells the story of the early protests, and illuminates how the regimes quickly suppressed these movements. Pitting citizen against citizen, the regimes have warned of an increasing threat from the Shia population. Relations between the Gulf regimes and their Shia citizens have soured to levels as bad as 1979, following the Iranian revolution. Since the crackdown on protesters in Bahrain in mid-March 2011, the "Shia threat" has again become the catchall answer to demands for democratic reform and accountability. While this strategy has ensured regime survival in the short term, Matthiesen warns of the dire consequences this will have for the social fabric of the Gulf States, for the rise of transnational Islamist networks, and for the future of the Middle East.

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Customer Reviews

For a Middle Easterner or anyone already familiar with how the GCC does politics in our region of the world, the book simply reiterates common knowledge. *Sectarian Gulf* states that the Arab Spring resurrected three visible threats to the Middle East's ancient regimes. The first is the "Shia threat," encapsulated by Iran's looming presence and aggressive vociferation. The GCC countries are all governed by Sunni ruling families, and any Iranian interference in the region

threatens old hierarchies in favor of Islamic states that follow the Shia sect. However, in addition to the fear of growing Shia sentiment, the GCC's royal families also worry that the Sunni Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which regained its intensity after winning elections in Egypt and Tunisia, might also destabilize the region's power structures. Hence, Sunni Islamism has become just as much a paramount threat to the status quo as Shia Islamism. Finally, the GCC regimes have had to contend with a third, even more dangerous threat: people power, which succeeded in toppling dictators in various other Arab countries. To prevent the people—the secular majority who view themselves as disenfranchised by current political systems—from uniting against the Gulf monarchies, the GCC's royal elite hired sectarian identity entrepreneurs to help this group maintain its dominance. "[S]ectarianism," writes Matthiesen, "was not just a government intervention but the result of an amalgam of political, religious, social and economic elites who all used sectarianism to further their own aim" (p. ix). Overall, while *Sectarian Gulf* is merely an introductory account of the GCC's political reaction to the Arab Spring, it remains highly relevant. This book illustrates how post-Arab Spring sectarianism is a particular strategy to divide the people and ward off the threat of serious, structural reforms.

i really like the book and wish to have the Arabic education

Everything you never knew you wanted to know about the Gulf, with the ins and outs of key players, written well and with obvious local perspective.

Interesting and different perspective on events and players in the Gulf region. Have some substantial differences with the author's viewpoints on events in Bahrain, based on long-time experience and residence in Saudi Arabia and some related periods in Bahrain on programs for HRD and industrial training (I've been a "Gulfie" area specialist in various capacities since the mid-1970s). I've read better, and I've read worse. While I have no regrets about buying and reading this book, I would recommend some other materials instead as "read ahead to get smart quick" references to Americans heading to the "upper Gulf" region (including Saudi Arabia).

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