

By Spencer Ackerman

From [Wired](#) | Original Article



*Photo: U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ashley Myers*

Tensions between the U.S. and Iran are at a high point, as the Islamic Republic threatens to close off a vital waterway and two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups sit in the seas off the Iranian coast. But across the Persian Gulf, the U.S. has a previously unacknowledged weapon in reserve: a new special operations team.

Danger Room has confirmed with the U.S. Special Operations Command that a new elite commando team is operating in the region. The primary, day-to-day mission of the team, known as Joint Special Operations Task Force-Gulf Cooperation Council, is to mentor military units belonging to the U.S.' oil-rich Arab allies, who collectively are known as the Gulf Cooperation Council. Those Arab states consider Iran to be their primary foreign threat.

The task force provides "highly trained personnel that excel in uncertain environments," Maj. Rob Bockholt, a spokesman for special-operations forces in the Mideast, tells Danger Room, and "seeks to confront irregular threats." The U.S. military has not previously acknowledged the existence of the team, known as JSOTF-GCC for short.

The unit began its existence in mid-2009 — around the time that the Iranian leadership [rejected](#)

President Obama's offer of a new diplomatic dialogue and underwent a serious internal challenge to its legitimacy from

[Green Movement protesters](#)

. But whatever the task force does about Iran — or might do in the future — is a sensitive subject with the military.

"It would be inappropriate to discuss operational plans regarding any particular nation," Bockholt says about Iran.

There is no direct evidence that JSOTF-GCC has been involved in offensive action against Iran. It is unlikely, for instance, that JSOTF-GCC killed Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan last week, an assassination the U.S. has firmly denied any role in and for which the Israelis, reports Eli Lake of *Newsweek*, are [all but openly taking credit](#).

Some special-operations veterans — who did not wish to be identified or quoted — downplayed the significance of the new task force, expecting it to primarily advise Gulf nations on how to train their own forces, and speculated that its actual role against Iran was indirect at most. Col. Tim Nye, the chief spokesman for the U.S. Special Operations Command, says the task force is responsible “for coordinating all SOF [Special Operations Forces] engagements and training with Gulf Cooperation Council nations.”

The special operations forces of those nations have shown a notable improvement over the past year. Qatari commandos quietly traveled to Libya ahead of Moammar Gadhafi’s downfall to [prepare Libyan rebels](#) for the successful capture of Tripoli. The United Arab Emirates, another close U.S. ally, has also made its elite forces a priority, even [hiring Blackwater’s founder](#) to bolster their training.

Not many details are available about the task force. It’s built around Naval Special Warfare Unit Three, one of the elite Navy SEAL teams. But the “Joint” in the task force’s name signals that it draws from the special-operations forces in the Army, Air Force and Marines as well. Its commander is a Navy captain or equivalent in a different service.

Officials would not identify missions of the task force, its leadership or its headquarters, citing the safety of the personnel involved and the success of those missions.

Even if JSOTF-GCC is primarily a training team, it represents another military option for the U.S. in the region during at a time of escalating rhetoric with Iran. The Iranians are threatening to [close off the Strait of Hormuz](#), the sea lane through which a fifth of the world’s oil travels, as [two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups](#) float nearby. And when the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff says [the U.S. could reopen the waterway by force](#), there might be an elite commando team nearby to help do it.