

# *U.S. Secretary of Defense Urges Arab States to Unite Against Iran*

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Jeddah, May 16 (RHC)-- The U.S. secretary of defense has called on the Persian Gulf Arab states to close ranks against the Islamic Republic. Chuck Hagel, who was addressing defense ministers from the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Jeddah, claimed that Iran poses a “threat” to the region.

His divisive allegations come against the backdrop of Saudi Arabia’s intention to improve its relations with Iran. On May 13th, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said Riyadh is ready to engage in negotiations with Iran on the improvement of bilateral relations. He said Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had been invited to visit Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. secretary of defense also attributed “destabilizing activities” to Iran for its support for the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Iran and Saudi Arabia remain split over several regional issues such as the situation in Syria and Bahrain.

Tehran has always been critical of Riyadh’s support for the heavy-handed crackdown of the Bahraini regime on peaceful protesters. Riyadh also supports foreign-backed militants operating against the Syrian government, while Iran stresses the importance of resolving the crisis in Syria through political approaches.

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