

The Causes of South West Asia Tensions and the Presence of World Powers in the Region; with Emphasis on Geopolitics of Energy

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Abstract

Since the Persian Gulf region is rich in energy resources, it has always been a witness to the presence of out-regional powers. In order to politically and economically dominate the region in different eras, the great powers formulated short-term and long-term plans. Among all, in order to maintain its economic supremacy in the world and maintain the regional order, the United States of America paid special attention to the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it found the cooperation with the Arabic countries in line with its policies a step towards energy security of this region so that it could transport oil and gas resources to its country with spending a little amount of money. In the meantime, other major powers such as the European Union, Russia, and China need energy resources of the Persian Gulf for launching their industry. Obviously, this can increase the confrontation of great powers with each other in the Persian Gulf region. This study sought to investigate the reasons for the presence of powers in the Persian Gulf region. Therefore, research methodology in this study was analytical-descriptive, and data were collected through library research and fieldwork in order to analyze the consequences of the presence of out-regional powers in the Persian Gulf. Hence, with the prevalence of regional conflicts and strife in South West Asia, we witnessed the change of the geo-economic structure of gas and oil; the reason for the presence of world powers in this area is to first supply the needed energy of their country in order to run industry and to secondly limit their competitors' energy supply.

Keywords: Geoeconomics, Geopolitics, Trans-regional powers, Persian Gulf.

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1. Introduction

The Persian Gulf region is highly important geopolitically and geo-economically. This area is not only limited to the cultural and political relations of the actors with each other, but the out-regional powers as intervening actors actively play a role in this area (Carey et al., 2005, p. 3). Throughout the history of the Persian Gulf, an out-regional power could always have shaped relations between the actors of the region and met its economic and political interests. This issue also emanates from the international structure and system, in which out-regional actors ought to interfere in the affairs of regions and meet their needs in order to compete with their competitors (Daojiong, 2015, p. 57).

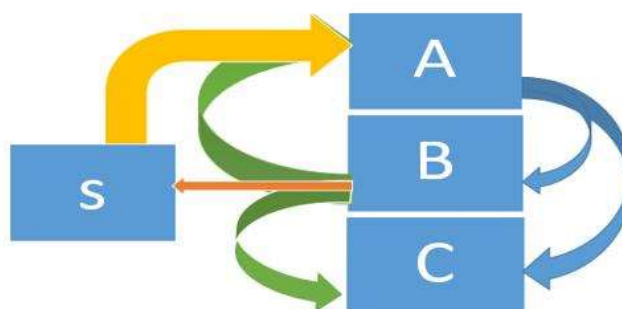


Figure 1. The model of competition and entrance of an intervening actor in the Persian Gulf (Source: Hafeznia and et al., 2017).

In the meantime, in the 1970s, the United States tended to be present more than ever, and after the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War, it established its footing. It could not only shape the political order and the regional actors' relationships and established many military bases in countries in the region, but it also could geo-economically invest in the energy sector of the Persian Gulf, especially oil and gas, and supplied its needed energy with low costs (Kent, 1968: 74). Geo-economically, the United States finds having access to Persian Gulf oil in order to supply its

growing needs and controlling the consumer market in this area its important objectives. In addition to this objective, the security of the Hormuz Strait and the pass routes to carry oil to Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific has tremendous importance (www.weforum.org). Controlling and dominating oil resources as the world's largest store allow the United States to continue sustaining the leadership position of the industrial Western world, particularly when the major powers such as the European Union, China, and Russia sometimes endanger America's position (www.chevron.com). It must be acknowledged that the Persian Gulf region is also extraordinarily important strategically. Based on the theory of NATO, the United States conceives of this region as its third line of strategic defense after America and Europe, especially when in addition to oil reserves and shipment lines protecting the security of the United States' and its allies' capital in the region is being considered (www.iags.org). Besides political and economic goals, military cooperation is one of the United States' multimodal strategies in the region. The expansion of the relationships of the countries around the Persian Gulf region with the United States has been such that in spite of the opposition of the Gulf Cooperation Council with regard to dispatching combat forces to freedom operation program in Iraq in 2003, the military cooperation among conservative Arab countries and the United States has surprisingly been widespread during the war (www.opec.org).

2. Methodology

The method of data gathering was library research (note-taking, table, using statistical data and modeling) and a combination of resources such as books, magazines, journals, Internet resources, statistics, and information from internal and external websites, ..., and data and statistical information related to 2015 and 2016 and fieldwork including interviews and information exchange with experts in geopolitics.

3. Theoretical Framework

With the beginning of the 21st century and with the increase of the importance and role of economics in the global relations, it seems that the global system entered the world of new experience, the century in which geo-strategic discourse and military power were replaced with geo-economic discourse and economic power (Meidan et al., 2015, p. 14). Competition for Energy resources has always been one of the common issues in the geo-politic world, which not only leads to conflicts among powers but it also threatens producer countries. The ever-increasing need for energy, especially in recently-developed countries of East and South Asia has created new rivals for the traditional consumers, and competition and struggle for extraction, utilization, and energy transfer, and proposed routes have brought new issues on geopolitical concerns into play (Daily, 2014, p. 7). Among all, oil and gas, in that they have high shares in the Balance of energy in the world, had gained a special position in the international relations and influenced international policy (Hafeznia, 2016, p. 102). Maybe, there is nothing more influential than oil and gas in the world policy and today's geopolitical developments. Global and regional crises, political developments, and changing economic relations especially in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea are mainly influenced by oil and gas(www.project-syndicate.org).

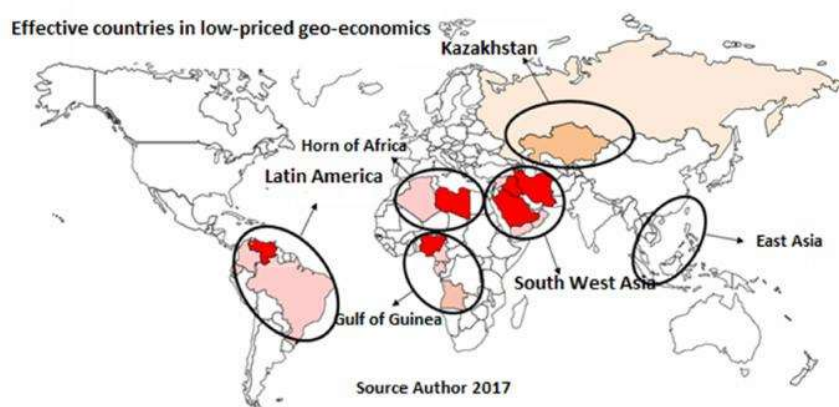


Figure 2. The influential countries in the low price of energy (Source: references 45 to 57).

In the map above, bold-colored countries include those which are involved in the regional and global competition, and this made them try to gain high income, and in the wake of the competition they caused oil price reduction. On the other hand, these conflicts turned these areas to a weaponry market in return for oil and gas, and this, in addition to the aggravation of disputes that caused prolonging cheap wholesale, flourished weaponry industries of East and West. Pink and low-colored countries include those which move in the shadows and try to absorb the sales market and earn income without risk. On the one hand, these countries have today become the petroleum dealers of countries involved in disputes and the typical example in the Persian Gulf region is Oman. But what is very strange in between is the arrival of Kazakhstan to the oil market. Kazakhstan is a country under the control of Russia, a besieged country deterred by this besiegedness. However, what is evident today is its entry in south West Asian countries were in a war, and this is a danger to Iran in the long-term. To the competitive market of oil, the country where Russia has given it permission to do this. In addition, it performs as Russia wants because Russia has not a good reputation among the oil and gas buyers,

since it almost always is susceptible to stop energy transfer in order to put pressure on buyers. Kazakhstan has always been neutral. In the meantime, maybe it seems that Kazakhstan is independently selling its oil and gas, but in reality Kazakhstan is the seller of Russia's oil and gas to its competitors; but what is important is that Kazakhstan entered into the sphere of oil and gas sale and tried to appropriate the market when South West Asian countries were in a war, and this is a danger to Iran in the long-term.

Geoffrey Kemp, influenced by the theory of heartland of Mackinder, talks about global energy oval or heartland energy. This oval area is extended from the South of Russia and Kazakhstan to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Kemp & Harkavi, 2007: 187-411). Attacks to the Persian Gulf in a few recent years with the excuses such as terrorism and human rights stem from energy needs of the world and should be considered in any geo-politic analyses (Yergin, 2014: 18). On the other hand, the data show increasing need of East Asia, especially China, to the Gulf's energy in two forthcoming decades because the need of this country up to 2020 approximately doubles, and in such a situation this country's policies for providing energy will certainly change (Meidan, 2015: 16).

4. Findings

4.1. The Geo-economic Competition of the United States and Great Powers in the Persian Gulf Region

Due to its geo-strategic position, the Persian Gulf has always been the center of focus by great powers. After England left the Persian Gulf region, the United States was the only regional power until the end of the Cold War. After the Cold War, other major powers tried to start having an influence on the Persian Gulf so that most experts find the entry of new players to the Persian Gulf region the most significant reason why American hegemony in this area was challenged (Helle, 1987: 214). In the present condition, the United States competes with the European Union, Russia, and China in economic, strategic, and political equations in the Persian Gulf.



Figure 3. Geo-economic competition cycle (Source: authors 2016).

According to the above model, it is believed that world powers in their competition seek four aspects including a victory in geo-economic competition, security provision and assurance of nonstop imports of petroleum-based materials, prevention of access of petroleum-producing countries to higher levels of science, exploitation of petroleum-producing countries by imposing or encouraging them to reduce the oil price in the wake of intensified competition and tension among the countries in the region.

After the September 11, 2001 incident because of the secure-political approaches arising from the international atmosphere, in addition to political and economic issues, the European Union put security, intelligence, and economics cooperation on the agenda of the joint meeting of Foreign Ministers (Blank, 2016: 22). The European Union aimed to attain two major goals in the Persian Gulf: because of this, maintaining stability for the European Union matters. The instability, in addition to disrupting oil exports to the West, leads to the spread of insecurity to other areas and finally an increase in terrorist actions (Ruehle, 2015: 17).

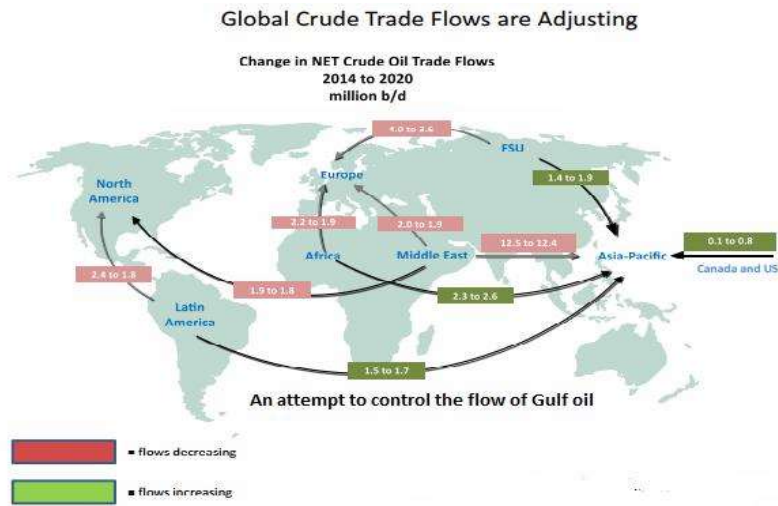


Figure 4. The cycle of energy imports and exports by countries (Source: references 45 to 57).

According to the above map, it can be easily understood that the trend of oil supply and demand changed or is changing, the major reasons of which are regional tensions and conflicts, especially in the South West Asia, which firstly sensitized countries importing oil from one specific resource and secondly countries not involved in conflict and war and have a relative stability are increasing their exports and taking the control of energy sales market. Among these, Russia and Latin American countries have been a step ahead. Therefore, Russia sought to double or triple its market and take control of marketplace used to be under control of countries in the Persian Gulf region, and Latin America also sought to seize the market of America as one of the importers of oil.

Table 1. The amount of European imports from Russia since the tension in South West Asia (Source: references 45 to 57)

Country	Percentage of imported gas from Russia
Finland	100
Romania	94
Greece	81
Ukraine	77
Austria	74
Germany	39

It is worth noting that economic and trade relations form the main dimensions of the relationships between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and European countries, the relationships that have always been growing; But since the outbreak of the regional conflicts in South West Asia, this balance was lost, and Russia turned to be the main exporter of oil and gas to Europe (Parker, 2015: 3). Bilateral agreements between the Persian Gulf countries and European countries as well as the agreement of the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in recent years have provided a good platform for further expansion of relations between the European powers (Lutz, 2016: 25).

Table 2. Risky oil- and gas-producing countries (Source: References 45 to 57)

The percentage of oil income in gross production in 2016			
Persian gulf countries		Countries with high risk	
Saudi Arabia	46	Iran	22
Qatar	51	Iraq	45
Kuwait	54	Libya	52
United Arab Emirates	22	Russia	14

About 12% of the oil of the Gulf Cooperation Council is exported to markets in the European Union, and the Union is the second largest export destination after Japan. Conversely, the Gulf Cooperation Council is the fifth major export market from the European Union and the seventh import source to European Union (Cheng, 2016: 41). However, the European Union met its crude oil needs increasingly from other areas, but the Persian

Gulf energy is highly significant for the European Union because it can replace Russia oil if necessary. The European Union has been able to stabilize its position as the largest exporter to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Rollo, 2008: 3-4). The European Union possessed about 10% of export and 30% of import of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in 2008. About half of the export of the European Union to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is machinery and equipment, and 80% of imports of the European Union from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries includes oil, petrochemical material, and metals. In the case of service trade, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries exported 22.4% of the European Union's services in 2007 (Vaezi, 2010: 31).

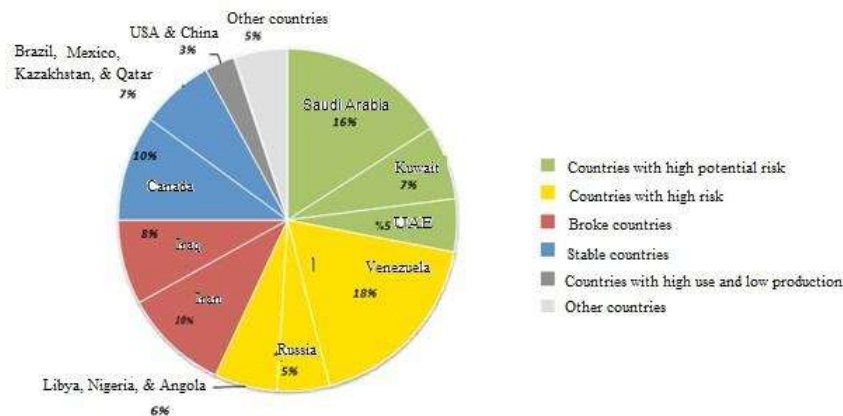


Figure 5. Classification of oil-producing countries based on production risks (Source: references 45 to 57).

The above chart indicates the extent of production risks of oil-producing countries. Therefore, countries involved in the regional and global competition try to increase their geo-politic importance by increasing their crude oil production. Therefore, considering the structure of the chart, it can be easily understood that countries including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Venezuela, Russia, Libya, Nigeria, and Angola relied on selling

raw oil in order to increase their gross domestic product, and therefore countries with high potential risks and high risks are those which are either involved in the regional and global competition or involved in the civil war. Hence, they increased their liquidity so that they can buy weapons to strengthen war fronts, but it should be noted that Iraq and Iran alliance because of the existence of economic sanctions led to narrowing the circle of buyers. Therefore, stable countries are those which have drawn themselves out of the tense competition.

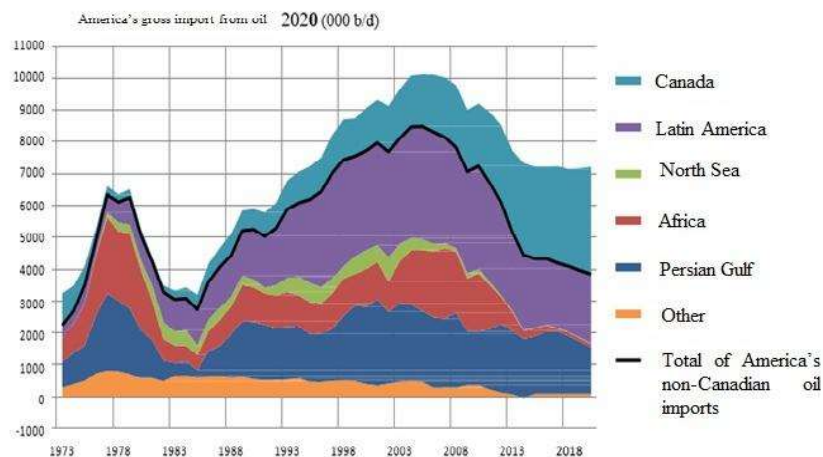


Figure 6. America's oil imports from different regions of the world (Source: references 45 to 57).

Based on the above chart, it can be understood that America sought to multiply its oil resources because a country that claims the presidency of the globe should behave prudently so as not to give a pressure leverage to the others. On the one hand, according to the above diagram, it is evident that America wishes to dominate the oil fields of the world in the long term so that it can influence the industrial life of its competitors. Hence, according to the diagram, it can be understood that America aimed to reduce its dependence on the Persian Gulf energy and replace it with Latin American

countries as its backyard life.

The cooperation agreement between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council member countries, which was signed in 1988 and was practically put in action in 1990, is the main framework of the economic participation of the Europeans in the Persian Gulf. This is the first contract signed between the European Union and an Arab regional organization, which aimed to mainly create a joint institutional framework at the levels from heads to expert groups in sake of economic and technical cooperation. Economic cooperation is carried out through the creation of working groups specialized in the field of energy, environment, and industry, and educational cooperation is among other joint programs (Sagheb, 2006). One of the objectives of these negotiations was the agreement of the free trade zone. Negotiations of this agreement began in 1989. The European Union stated that equal foreign trade policies in the form of a customs union are the prerequisite of creating the free trade zone with the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bejesky, 2011: 196).

In 2001, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council decided to create the customs union until January 2003. As a result, in July 2001 the European Union decided to extend the contract of the free trade zone in cases like trade in services and intellectual property rights to new areas of bilateral trade, on which talks were going. Finally, the joint Council of Europe-Arabs in Granada in February 2002 decided to start talks in order to create a free trade zone between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (Sagheb, 2007), but these negotiations did not end up with an agreement, and in December 2008 the Gulf Cooperation Council member countries decided to discontinue the talks. They disagreed with the convention related to the human rights, included in the agreements by the European Union. The European Union has long sought to end the difference in gas export pricing by these countries, remove obstacles to the access of European companies to Gulf Cooperation Council services sector, and

remove a lack of transparency in the regulation of the purchase of goods by the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Despite Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization in December 2005, the obstacles on investing, shopping, and services still insisted to remain, and this caused the dissatisfaction of European Commission (Biberovic, 2008: 4-7).

In addition to good political interactions and extensive economic relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Europe, the efforts to deepen security ties have been going on. Despite some progress toward diplomacy and collective and regional communications between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union in economy, security issues have still remained mainly in the level of bilateral relations (Barzegar, 2012: 9).

The members of the Gulf Cooperation Council signed some defense and security agreements with some members of the European Union, as a result of which the European Union became the most important exporter of defense equipment to the region. Among European Union member countries, two countries, France and the United Kingdom, have been more active in this field. In addition, those two countries mainly focused on selling weaponry and establishing military bases. On this basis, it can be said that, besides America, the European Union is an option to which Council countries pay attention in political, economic, and security issues. In the 1980s, Europe wanted to obey or be in line with America in security policies and issues in the Persian Gulf region, but after the period of the Cold War, European countries aimed to play a more independent security roles in the Persian Gulf. In the 1990s, selling weapons and the transportation of weaponry from Western Europe to the Persian Gulf unprecedentedly increased (U.S. Energy, 2009: 45).

In the last decade and after September 11, with regard to the higher tendency of most members of Gulf Cooperation Council, especially Saudi Arabia, to extending its security-political relations with European

governments, the members of the European Union aimed to play a more important political and security role in the Persian Gulf (Izadi, 2008: 91-95). The United Kingdom, in addition to active participation in the Coalition forces, to freeing Kuwait since 1991 and in 2003 war as well against Iraq, as well as for overthrowing Saddam Hussein and the establishment of military forces in southern Iraq and military presence in Kuwait, has been active in selling weaponry, including the British military contract with Saudi Arabia in order to sell 72 fighter aircraft Typhon worth £4,430,000. In 1991 coalition, French military forces participated in freeing Kuwait, but France did not participate in the 2003 war against Iraq. Following America's invasion to Iraq and dissatisfaction of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries with American and British policies, France found a good opportunity for expanding its influence in the Persian Gulf so that, as some experts believe, this region turned to be the main axis of Arabic policy of France (U.S. Energy, 2016: 78).

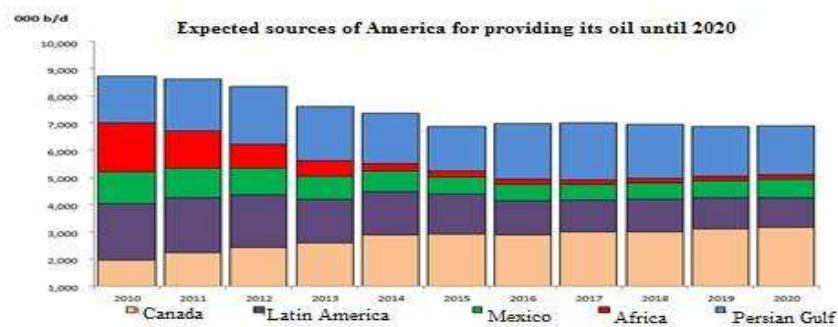


Figure 7. Expected sources of America for providing its oil (Source: references 45 to 57).

Despite some efforts and security agreements between European countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council members, in terms of security, Europe cannot or do not want to guarantee security for these countries

parallel to U.S. actions. On the other hand, the Gulf Cooperation Council members prefer America in political and security cooperation, and security cooperation with European countries is of a lower priority. Meanwhile, the future of this type of cooperation between Europe and the Gulf countries depends on the power structure at the level of the international system and role-playing of powers at the regional level in the Persian Gulf (Annual Energy, 2017: 27).

What is certain is that the European Union's relations with the Mediterranean areas are of a higher priority compared to the relations with the Persian Gulf region. Relationships between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council in terms of internal competition among the countries of the Council and tendency to establishing bilateral relations, especially in the security issues as well as inconsistency in political and economic strategies of the European Union towards the Council, was not at the desired level. It can be said that the European Union's approach to economic issues in the relations with the Persian Gulf region slackened their geo-politic presence, and on the other hand its approach towards security issues led to the neglect of political reform in this area (Youngs, 2009: 12).

Unlike European countries which mainly have adopted the policy of cooperation, and depending on the circumstances in some periods the competition policy, at the international level including in the area of South West Asia with the US, Russia as a great power in international politics aimed to create a balance against U.S. in the Persian Gulf and prevented America from obtaining a hegemonic position in the region. Of course, considering the U.S. military supremacy in the Persian Gulf and the lower possibility and weak desire of other powers to create military and hard balance against it, most of the efforts of Russia and China to create balance were concentrated on soft balance (Bejesky, 2011: 197).

Soft balance, in contrast to traditional, hard one which emphasizes physical change of balance, aims to undermine, neutralize, and increase the

cost of unilateral measures of superior power. On this basis, the centerpiece of Russia's policy was mainly to increase the influence and expand economic and political relations with the Persian Gulf region. In the Persian Gulf, the Russian competition and balance against America is also somehow a function of its policies and general considerations in relation to the United States by taking the specific conditions of the region into account. After September 11, and especially after the U.S. invasion to Iraq in 2003, America adopted an aggressive, unilateral approach in the Persian Gulf region, and especially aimed to fundamentally change the regional order in different dimensions and prevent the influence of other major powers, especially China and Russia, in the Gulf (theconversation.com).

This approach led to the broader efforts of these two countries in order to create a soft balance towards America in the Persian Gulf, among which expansion of relations with Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, interaction with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and generally assistance to create a multimodal and more comprehensive order in the Persian Gulf are included(Vaezi, 2010: 36-34).

Middle East: Decades of Instability

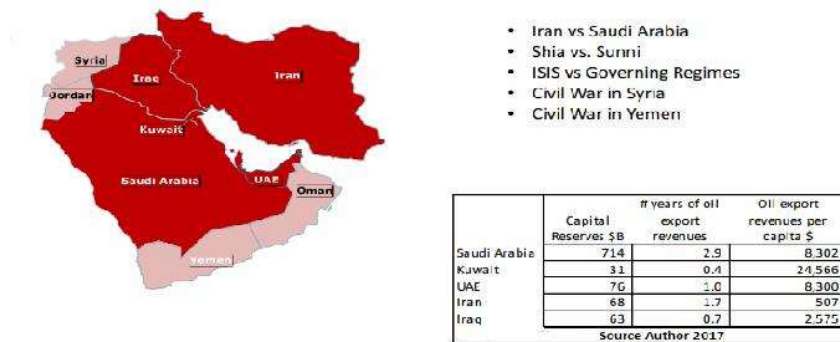


Figure 7: Oil export and revenues of South West Asian countries in the instability

Iran against Saudi Arabia Shia against Sunni ISIS against governments Civil war in Syria Civil war in Yemen			
Country	Asset reserves (billion dollars)	Annual income of oil	Income per capita from oil export (billion dollars)
Saudi Arabia	714	2.9	8320
Kuwait	31	0.4	24566
UAE	76	1.0	8300
Iran	68	1.7	507
Iraq	63	0.7	2575

Table 3: Petroleum income of South West Asian countries in the instability decades (Source: references 45 to 57)

With the selection of Vladimir Putin to the Presidency of the Russian Federation in 2000 and with the increase of Russia’s economic and political power, which happened in light of his management and a global increase in energy cost, the Kremlin found an opportunity to define broader scopes in foreign policy. Accordingly, Moscow adopted an active diplomacy in

different regions of the world such as Latin America, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf. In General, Russian Middle-Eastern policy should be seen within the framework of Russia's macro-policy in dealing with unilateral trends in the international arena and the realization of the idea of “cult new Russian foreign policy” of the multipolar world (Blank, 2016: 22).

The compilation of Vladimir Putin's document on 28 June 2000 and its re-approval with a few changes by Dimitri Medvedev in 2008 represents such a policy well. The point worthy of attention is the simultaneity of the approval of such a plan with the new conservative rise to power with the leadership of George Bush in the United States, the terrorist attacks of September 11, United States' military attack to Afghanistan and Iraq, and the announcement of plans like the greater Middle East plan by the Washington to make fundamental changes in the region of the Middle East. Throughout these changes, Moscow tried to take advantage from the breaks and the conflicts emerged among the Arab countries of the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, and the United States (with respect to the suspicion of Saudi Arabians in September 11 incident), in order to consolidate its position in the region of the Middle East and especially the Gulf region (Ülke, 2009: 106).

Travel of Amir Abdullah, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia at that time, to Moscow in 2003 (as the first trip of an official to Russia throughout history), the acceptance of Hamas' political delegation after achieving power in Palestinian parliamentary elections in March 2006 (despite extreme pressures of the Western world on this political movement), Putin's travel to the United Arab Emirates for the first time since the formation of the country in September 2007, and his trip to the three countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan) in February 2007 (which took place for the first time) are signs of developments in the Russia's relations with countries in the Persian Gulf region. In all visits, Vladimir Putin tried to criticize the unilateral policy of Washington at the international level so that he could introduce

Russia as a reliable and trustworthy partner (Bilgin, 2009: 58).

By the same token, only a day after Putin's explicit criticisms of unilateral policies of Washington at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, he went to Saudi Arabia, the close ally of Washington. Putin again at Riyadh's Economic Conference repeated his Munich remarks and once again stated that we are calling for the more fair system in the structure of power in the international community based on the principles of equality of rights and respect for all persons regardless of their religious affiliations(Dorian, 2007: 549).

In fact, Moscow sought to ally itself with close allies of Washington in the region of the Middle East so that its macro-policy in relation to the realization of the multipolar world became feasible. Moscow, in the continuation of this policy and on the regional level, called for the new order in the Middle East region, especially the Persian Gulf region. Most of the new Russian movements, in fact, are signs of its attempts to establish a balanced system with the United States in the Middle East region. In other words, from the perspective of this group of experts, Russian policy-makers defined Russian diplomacy in the Middle East and Russia within the framework of the geo-politic competition with the United States (Smith, 2007: 2). Another important thing which is evident in Russia's political behavior in the Persian Gulf region is conveyance of this message to the leaders of the region which is contrary to the partial approach of Washington that only seeks to establish relations with Arab countries of the region, Moscow is able to establish balanced relationships between Iran and Arab countries and the world of Shia and Sunni simultaneously. On this basis, with adopting moderate attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as Iran's challenges with the Arab countries of the region particularly in the case of the nuclear issue, Moscow is attempting to align the participation of all parties with the positions and perspectives of Russia(Vaezi, 2010: 39-38). Eventually, it should be pointed out that China

with its economic presence in the Persian Gulf challenged the economic glory and dignity of the United States significantly. The countries of the Persian Gulf region do not have to cooperate with the United States in all areas related to the economy, commerce, and security, and they emphasize on the continuation of strategic relations with China. In the last two decades, China is becoming one of the international powers, and in political literature it is mainly called as an emerging power (Allsopp et al., 2001: 13). The rapid economic growth of China in the last two decades and its hurried move to become more influential in the arena of international relations have increased its influence on international issues. The re-definition of China's strategic position in recent years that is influenced by economic growth, and as a result its Military and diplomatic power, has changed its foreign policy in different areas. One of the areas which were redefined in recent years in China's foreign policy is the Persian Gulf region. This area and countries located in that, due to having the highest energy reserves, are of the highest capability in providing energy security and responding to the country's strategic needs. With understanding this issue, China in recent years tried to improve relations with the oil producers of the region, especially the major ones so that in the light of it China could increase its share of the reserves as much as possible (Vaezi, 2010: 39).

Many American analysts believe that China's move is worrisome and hold that China's economic, and consequently political, move threatens the U.S. interests, but they disagree on how to manage or control the threat. Some analysts analyze the issue from the perspective of the Chinese authorities or from their own perspective. From the perspective of this group, the Chinese officials and leaders see the world Government-centered and competitive, in which power plays the fundamental role. Accordingly, they are determined to use every tool for the development of power, influence, and prosperity in the global level and, consequently, degrade the position of the United States (Allsopp et al., 2001: 14).

Chinese behavior in the finance, commerce, and energy shows a kind of cardiac invasive approach of power in politics. In this way, the United States should define a comprehensive strategic plan to face with Chinese move by approaches such as the consolidation of regional alliance. Although leaders of China have tried to show its growth as peaceful, it virtually ignores many international norms because they seek to degrade the influence and power of the United States and introduce China as an alternative superpower. Although some analysts approve the existence of such an approach, they believe that the United States should strive to manage and control China's behavior and policy (Dumbaugh, 2009: 2).

4.2. Similarities between the United States and China in the Persian Gulf

The United States and China are similar with respect to the maximum use of energy reserves in the Persian Gulf, weaponry exchanges to the countries of the region, and economic exchanges with the countries of the Persian Gulf.

4.3. Maximum Use of Energy Reserves of the Persian Gulf

Although China increased its domestic production and may need 6.3 million barrels of oil daily by 2020, it will need more than double this amount and the best place to supply will not be anywhere except for the Persian Gulf. For this reason, energy security is China's main concern in foreign policy in the Persian Gulf (Yazdani & Akbarian, 2012: 322). China, according to its economic interests and energy security, seeks to develop relations with all countries of the Middle East. To import oil from Oman and Saudi Arabia as the main suppliers, China is heavily dependent on the Persian Gulf (Mosallanezhad & Haghshenas, 2012: 192). On the one hand, since the Persian Gulf had and has most of oil and gas and plays a major role in the current needs and in the increasing demand for future oil supply, the United States' power and national security is in a linear way dependent on the security and stability of oil and policy of the Middle East and Persian Gulf. This dependency may be a very serious point of vulnerability for the world's

foremost power that may cause many small, medium, and large rivals of the U.S. including oil producers and exporters in the Persian Gulf to think of utilization, appropriation, or non-accompaniment (Heshmatzadeh, 2011: 221-217). Therefore, the United States tries its best to maximally use energy reserves of the Gulf the same way as China (Barzegar & Hesn, 2015: 21).

4.4. Weaponry Exchanges to the Countries of the Region

Many analysts do not know and do not tell the exact amount of the weaponry sales to the Persian Gulf countries by China; however, Wakefield and Lonstein believe that China has adopted a pragmatic approach in connection with the Iran-Iraq war during that war (Bryce & Levenstein, 2011: 14). In the case of the United States, it should also be stated that from 2011 to 2012 the Middle Eastern countries purchased weapons worth more than 123 billion dollars. Most of these weapons were bought by the Persian Gulf countries, and also most of these weapons have been achieved through bilateral defense arrangements with the United States of America (Agharebparast & Barzegar, 2012: 19). In order to create balance against Iran in the region and widespread repression of the protest movement in their country, Arab countries made it possible to export more and more light and heavy weapons from the United States to their countries.

4.5. Commercial Exchanges with the Persian Gulf Countries

Relationships between China and the Persian Gulf countries will be extensive and vital in all dimensions. Since 2006, Asia has become the greatest economic partner of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The data showed that 55% of the total trade of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries included hydrocarbon materials. Therefore, the trade between China and the aforementioned countries will rise to between 350 and 500 billion dollars until 2020 (Molavi, 2012: 48), but in addition to the southern countries of the Gulf, China largely extended its economic relations with Iran. The amount of bilateral trade between Iran and China increased more than 60 times during more than a decade from 1999 to 2008. In 1994,

bilateral trade was \$448 million, while in 2008 this amount rose to 30 billion dollars (Vaezi, 2010: 41).

During the recent decades, the Gulf Cooperation Council members, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have pushed a large amount of their foreign investment towards the United States. These investments were in the form of buying stocks of different factories and depositing in banks. After September 11, some Arab investors were extremely worried about the possibility of confiscation or block of their assets in the United States, but the American Government attempted to obviate their fears in order to prevent the occurrence of the disorder in the investment process and general protection of the position of the international assurance. Continual trade and investment by the rich Persian Gulf countries in the United States, in addition to empowering the process of economic growth, play a significant role in the protection of structural balance of the American economy(Qanbarlo, 2006: 655).

4.6. Dissimilarities between the United States and China in the Persian Gulf

Dissimilarities of the United States and China include unilateral approach of the United States versus multilateral approach of China, pragmatic approach of China versus ideological approach of the United States (With an emphasis on energy), software security of China versus hardware security the United States.

4.7. Unilateral Approach of the United States versus Multilateral Approach of China

Balancing and competition of China and Russia against the United States in the Persian Gulf are a kind of function of these two countries' policies and general considerations towards the United States by taking the specific conditions of the region into account. After September 11, and especially after the attack of the United States to Iraq in 2003, the United States adopted a unilateral and invasive approach in the Persian Gulf region, and in

particular, it aimed to change the basic regional order in different dimensions and prevent the influence of other major powers, especially China and Russia in the Persian Gulf. This approach led these two countries to the wider effort for creating soft balancing against the United States in the Persian Gulf. Among these efforts are the expanding the relations with the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region, interacting with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and generally helping to create a more comprehensive and multimodal order in the Persian Gulf (Vaezi, 2010: 36-35).

In recent years, China tried to expand and deepen the relations with Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel as the main countries of the region. By putting ties with Egypt within the framework of strategic cooperation, cooperating strategically with Saudi Arabia, and founding extensive cooperation with Iran and Israel, China aimed to achieve that. Efforts to deepen and institutionalize relations with the Middle Eastern countries by China can be the natural outcome of the redefinition of its strategic position on international politics. The rapid improvement of China's strategic position in the international arena, on the one hand, has expanded its interests and, on the other hand, expanded its security environment. The Persian Gulf is an area which is important for China in both the above areas, and therefore the Chinese expansion of influence is necessary and rational. Therefore, the expansion of influence can be one of the components of China's Middle Eastern policy (Barzegar & Askari Hesni, 2015: 23).

On the one hand, the United States calls for the unilateral security system and wants to strengthen hegemony, based on the axial role of NATO in regional security arrangements in the region and also the bilateral military agreement contracts with the region's countries, and it oftentimes emphasized unilateral security-oriented policies in the framework of the military policies and seeks to make the identity of the Persian Gulf security-based (Dehshiri, 2004: 134). For example, after the Islamic revolution, since 1980, the Persian Gulf security became the main priority of the United

States. On this basis, for this region, various security plans were predicted and implemented. The first phase of the security plan was from 1980 to 1990, in which the main developments are the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran-Iraq war. In this period, the weakening of Iran and Iraq and creating a balance between them were the main axes of the security plan. The second phase which started with Iraq's attack to Kuwait and the Soviet Union collapse (the end of the Cold War) extended from 1990 to 1995 (Crane et al., 2009, p. 78). In this period, control of Iran and Iraq in the form of dual containment policy and also enhancement of the cooperation between the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries were prioritized. In this regard, numerous military and security contracts between the United States and countries in the Persian Gulf were signed, which is a reason for the American military presence in the area throughout next periods. The third phase of the security plan of the Persian Gulf extended from 1996 to 2006, which is called Clinton's program. In the third phase, promoting the security cooperation between the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, fighting against terrorist networks and the proliferation of Atomic arms, overturning Saddam's regime, and fighting with Iran's empowerment were planned, and some of them were operationalized.

The fourth security plan of the United States in the Persian Gulf was from 2006 to 2011, which is called Bush's program (Crane et al., 2009, p. 108). The basis of the fourth security plan was to address short-term and long-term security concerns of the United States in the region that included cases of threats such as dissemination of arms, the Iranian threats which stem from its regional strategy and its missile and nuclear programs, and threats resulting from the presence of other major powers such as China and Russia in the Persian Gulf. The three main bases of this plan include fighting terrorism and dissemination of arms, fighting against the balance changes of regional power, and structural changes in the security

architecture of the region (Barzegar & Askari Hesn, 2015: 24).

4.8. Chinese Pragmatic and American Ideological Strategy

While the United States used ideological strategy approach of human rights and other strategies to change and modify opponent political regimes like Iran's (imposing economic sanctions and punishments) and sought to impose cultural balancing and the imposition of life style and values and American consumption patterns to countries of the region, sometimes it helped to strengthen its allies against anti-Government movements entitled fighting Islamic structuralism and it supported disarm policy of the opponent regimes but not its allies so that it guarantees the military and weaponry supremacy of Israel to the countries in the region (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2011: 135).

Meanwhile, in addition to trying to institutionalize its relationships with all countries of the region without any external pressure, China concentrated on meeting its economic needs. For example, from 2000 to 2007, Iran and China's trade increased more than nine times (Barzegar & Askari Hesn, 2015: 26).

In this process, China became Iran's largest trade partner. Major export items to Iran included electronic equipment and military arms. Most of Iran's export to China was oil and gas and petrochemical products in General. In 2000, Iran's import from China was less than one billion dollars, and its export to China was less than two billion dollars. In 2009, these figures rose to about 8 and 13 billion dollars, respectively (Ilias, 2009: 32).

4.9. Hardware Security of the United States and Software Security of China

China emphasizes software security on the basis of soft policy and diplomatic negotiations (Vaezi, 2010: 40) whereas the United States believes hardware security relying on the rough and tough, restrictive policy using military power. China's main priorities are based on the economic tools and software, and the priorities of the United States are based on the

deployment of military and psychological and ideological pressures(Dehshiri, 2004: 139).

5. Analysis

This is a sad fact of life that most of the oil-producing countries in the world are unsustainable politically or are in strong opposition with the United States. Most of these countries are members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). While Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) produces about 40% of world oil, 80% of the world's proven reserves, and 85% of these reserves are in the Middle East. The wealth of OPEC member countries lets them be a strategic axis of the global politics and economy, but on human rights, political stability, and compliance with international law their record is bad. Twelve percent of the world's oil is in the hands of the State sponsors and are under U.S. / UN sanctions.

However, the remarkable changes in this sector change the geo-politic equations in the region: The United States is not an affiliated force in the region because shale gas revolution made it relatively independent of energy. If Iran's diplomatic efforts with the United States is successful, it can again be a regional competitor in this sector. The price of energy is unstable, which often reached to the lowest amount of the budget. Chinese demand will be significantly more. Two former major producers, Libya and Iraq, are in deep crises, and only produce their potential production. They have no quick solutions. Extremists control extensive territories across Syria and Iraq and sell crude oil with hardliner discounts. Although they did not have a significant enough impact on the oil market, this factor is enough for the continuous influx, the influx of money which devastates the region continuously and reduces the pipelines and trade.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the research showed that controlling supply sources and multiplying the energy sources are the primary interests of the United States in the Persian Gulf and the world. In the field of oil technology, the United States is approximately the top in the world because the American companies are of strategic excellence today at the world level and at the Persian Gulf region. Therefore, the strategy and framework of the United States foreign policy have always been “price security, supply security, and security of mutual supply and demand in this area”. Oil reserves in the Persian Gulf are one of the world's strategic reserves, and all the economic powers in the world try to increase their own influence on mining, refining, and transportation. With the attack of the United States and England to Iraq, the French and Russian oil companies were severely disadvantaged.

It is worth noting that United States’ vulnerability against oil issue is correlated with factors such as effective and powerful associations in the process of oil production, distribution, and pricing in the world. The most important association affecting vulnerability is OPEC. The American look to Iraq aimed to a large extent to reduce oil power of OPEC and replace Iraq with Saudi Arabia in this organization. To this end, the United States was looking for the realization of the idea of privatization of Iraq’s oil industry. The United States, in addition to these aims, sought to reduce OPEC oil pricing power, deprive non-allied oil-producing countries of income in the Persian Gulf region, and even try to change the regime in these countries in case of failure to apply these limitations.

It should be acknowledged that the United States believes that supremacy in the balance of powers in the future is dependent on the domination of geo-politic areas, which are rich in economic resources, so that by distorting economic security of rival countries it can attain the top position in the new order. In other words, by dominating the energy sources in the Persian Gulf, the United States aims to control oil flow security and control its price so that it can control the economic flow of Europe, Japan, and East Asia (i.e.,

the rivals which are the main importers of the Persian Gulf oil), so that it can align them with its aims in the new order. On this basis, the dominance of the United States on oil sources in the Persian Gulf, and especially Iraq, means shortening the European and Japanese hand from Iraqi oil and also means controlling the global oil market. This market can give the United States the possibility of weakening or recessing economic conditions of the rivals with fluctuating the oil supply and creation of instability in the global price of energy, if necessary. In other words, control of Iraq's strategic oil resources at the beginning of the 21st century makes the United States capable of attaining its complex arrangements with a command (monetary, economic, defensive, and security) and also the establishment of international oil order. In the new American strategy in the region, two factors democracy promotion and hardware (the use of military power to deal with threats) are seen. On this basis, the United States seeks to attain its goals by hardware and software strategy in the way of forming world order. Among the aims of the United States which are considered as a major strategy in the foreign policy of the country is to control the vital strategic and economic centers of the world by dominating the energy resources and controlling the world's advanced countries. The best solution for the implementation of this policy is to control oil-rich area in the Persian Gulf region, which the United States attained with the military invasion to Iraq in 2003. In the economic aspect, the national security of the United States is largely dependent on energy security and followingly Persian Gulf oil. In the security-defense aspect, the United States faces the issues such as terrorism, proliferation, religious extremism, the conflict between Israeli and Palestinians, the United States' military excellence, and its undisputed leadership in the world.

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