

Analyzing the Future of the Persian Gulf, Focusing on Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations

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Abstract

The Persian Gulf has long been a major geopolitical target of debate between Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose relations exert the greatest degree of influence over geopolitical affairs and proceedings of this region. In the course of the past decade, these long-standing relations sustained various political blemishes and tensions, the aftermath of which ushered in the withering of the region. Yet, current shifts in the status of Iran/Arabia relations bespeak of eases in such tensions, which in practical terms can significantly change the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, promising improvements in the economics, security, and military standing of this region. In this light, the present study proceeds with an analysis of the key factors and influential drivers affecting the prospective geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, with an emphasis on relations between the two countries thereof. In terms of methodology, this study is an applied research employing data obtained via interviews with experts of the field. As evident from the findings, the most influential parameters affecting the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf include factors of trans-regional partners, authoritative powers, joint markets, maritime cooperation, oil and gas trades, arms races, intra-regional conflicts, currency relations, transit of goods and interventions by China. Taking into account such factors allows for a geopolitical convergence in the region.

This future study regarding the sources of tension and regional opportunities in the Persian Gulf, particularly from the perspective of constructive strategies in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, benefits from the use of innovative research techniques.

Keywords: Geopolitical Region, Regional Convergence, Futurology, MICMAC.

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1. Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia have long assumed the mantle of geopolitics in the Persian Gulf and are expected to enact major roles in various geopolitical changes and proceedings in this area. This being the case, international alliances between the two countries have become imperiled by various provocations and tensions brought forth by political developments in the past few decades, the repercussions of which have precipitated negative outcomes in the region. Yet, recent reports on newly employed politics and international developments bear witness to parleys on decreasing such tensions and improving political and geopolitical relations between the two nations. If implemented successfully, such proceedings can practically change the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf and ameliorate its economic, security, and military status in the future.

Despite limited bilateral and multilateral collaborations in the past few decades, the ruling international correspondence among countries of the Persian Gulf—particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia as its most influential power figures—has ensued only rivalry, tension, war, and further conflicts stemming from geopolitical catastrophes.

Such unfortunate circumstances continue to avail for all countries of the Persian Gulf and its greater area, while at the same time nations of major geopolitical regions of the world, such as southeast Asia, pursue courses of action leading towards convergence, cooperation on commonalities and subsequently interactions in various affairs, particularly economics, most of which have bear fruitful with valuable achievements. Given their geopolitical authority and existing potentials and manifestos, Iran and Saudi Arabia, in the case of the Persian Gulf, are the conventional premiers expected to form regional coalitions and take measures towards regional convergence towards collective interests in economy and security. However, as mentioned earlier, apart from a few and unstable joint endeavors, the overall status on Iran/Arabia relations has shifted from a productive geopolitical competition to hostile acts of conflict, particularly in light of The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement between Iran and the P5+1 and later presidency of Donald Trump as well as terrorist activities of the ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Nevertheless, recent abates in tensions and conflicts anticipated by the presidency of Joe Biden in USA and Ibrahim Raesi in Iran presage signs of

mitigation in the tensivity of Iran/Arabia relations moving towards more genial associations between the countries whose embassies are now at the verge of reopening. Accordingly, the present study proceeds to analyze the key factors and effective drivers of the future geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, with an emphasis on Iran/Arabia relations.

2.Theoretical Framework

The global system is continuously undergoing change, and within this context, geopolitics is naturally influenced by these transformations. Factors such as population size and its balance, the role played by countries, global trade conditions among nations, identity and cultural issues, as well as the prospect of growth and development, are influential in altering the global and regional geopolitical order. This phenomenon can significantly impact the future of national, regional, and global developments, either mitigating or exacerbating tensions between countries (Godet and et al,1994:276).

Although analyzing the future and presenting a clear picture of it is not straightforward, geopolitics empowers analysts to provide a specific and realistic analysis of what lies ahead. In fact, understanding the future and the destiny of governments and nations cannot be solely navigated through the knowledge of political science, and it is imperative to leverage geopolitical knowledge in this regard. It is worth emphasizing that the increasing application of geopolitics, coupled with negligence towards its principles, poses a significant risk. Undoubtedly, some political successes can be attributed to attention to geopolitical knowledge. For instance, the skillful selection of English bases in Hong Kong and Singapore, the restructuring of politics in Australia, and the choice of Canberra as the capital—all of these instances underscore the pivotal role of geopolitical considerations (Dittmer and Joanne Sharp,2017:54-55).

Among the highly significant topics in geopolitical studies, one that underscores the transformations between nations is the concept of geopolitical domains. This is due to the fact that the claimed territories of governments have always been subject to variation over time, experiencing increments or decrements. Given that maritime and terrestrial domains are dynamic entities with social and human dimensions, the maintenance and control of these domains necessitate national, regional, and international rules and regulations. Safeguarding these territories has consistently posed a significant challenge for governments, manifesting itself in the context of

either convergence and peace or divergence and conflict (Yan Huang and Samid Suliman,2020:6).

Interaction or tension among countries over geopolitical domains generally occurs in a specific portion of the Earth referred to as a geopolitical region. A geopolitical region encompasses a part of the Earth's surface or a collection of neighboring political-spatial units, whether terrestrial or aquatic, characterized by a distinct geographical composition. It is defined by a combination of political and geographical factors, exhibiting coherence and a shared identity or common function, setting it apart from other adjacent regions and areas. Examples include the Persian Gulf region, the Bay of Bengal, and so forth. In essence, when discussing the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf, it refers to countries and individuals living in the vicinity of this region who share common identity traits (Mary Farrell and et al,2005:252).

In a geopolitical region, natural and human factors function politically, attracting the attention of governments, regional countries, and especially global powers. The interactions and reactions within this region give rise to patterns of competition, cooperation, and conflict. The geopolitical region serves as the foundation for shaping the spatial patterns of political relations among both intra-regional and extra-regional governments. Over its evolutionary process, the geopolitical region transforms into a geopolitical structure. In this context, regional and non-regional political forces become active, and processes of convergence, divergence, tension, rivalry, cooperation, and collaboration develop (Hafeznia,2005:112).

If active political forces, both internal and external, within the geopolitical structure, reach understanding and harmony with each other based on the structural and functional elements within the regional context, a form of mutual cohesion and interdependence, accompanied by a shared understanding of regional affairs, is established. The geopolitical structure converges towards a single or multi-criteria totality, culminating in complete alignment, and becomes the groundwork for establishing a regional organization (Hafeznia and Kavyani Rad,2008:76-73).

One highly significant factor contributing to the formation of convergence in geopolitical regions is the presence of identities with shared feelings and affiliations. Indeed, the sense of community, regarded as a common perception among groups on a regional scale, is considered responsible for

the emergence of a regional identity, with a predominant emphasis on cultural issues.

Alongside shared sentiments and cultural factors, some argue that the development of a regional identity, somewhat comparable to a sense of national belonging, places emphasis on realities that predate national identity. In many cases, it is perceived as a reality and a necessity for a high quality of life or social cohesion in a specific region. There is an emphasis on the need to strengthen convergence instead of divergence and tension (Dirksmeier,2021:3).

In the overall process of regionalism, there is an expectation that these efforts will provide a favorable image of the future in economic and political terms. The ideal characteristics are anticipated to have a positive impact on the foreign policies of the involved countries and ensure cohesive inclusiveness among nations. Essentially, it aims to present an appealing future image for the members. It is worth noting that constructing a common identity can be implemented through the soft and smart power as an ideal foundation for a country's foreign policy (Izotov and Obydenkova,2020:3).

Examining the trends and events in the Persian Gulf region and comparing it with the presented definitions of geopolitics and related concepts such as geopolitical domain and geopolitical region clearly indicates that this region is influenced by political and geographical components, possessing coherence and common functionalities. These characteristics distinguish it from other neighboring areas.

Furthermore, due to the interaction and reactions of global powers in this region, we witness distinct patterns of competition, cooperation, and conflict among actors, with Iran and Saudi Arabia being the main focal points in these patterns.

Considering that a geopolitical region, such as the Persian Gulf geopolitical region, transforms into a geopolitical structure in the initial stages of its evolutionary process, and subsequently, influenced by the cohesion and understanding of active political forces in the region, it has the potential for convergence with the goal of establishing a regional organization. This study aims to comprehend the necessity of fostering mutual cooperation and establishing security and peace in the region. It strives to identify the structural and functional elements both within and outside the region that

drive the future state of the area. Emphasizing futures studies and relevant analytical tools, the research seeks to assess and analyze these factors.

It is noteworthy that, due to the pivotal and unparalleled role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in shaping international relations in the Persian Gulf geopolitical region, the relations between these two countries are at the forefront of this research.

3.Future Studies

Today, futures studies have gained considerable attention across various academic domains, as researchers utilize them as interdisciplinary studies to mitigate future risks while envisioning desirable futures. Among the fields where futures studies have become increasingly prevalent, geopolitical knowledge stands out.

Therefore, the current research delves into the examination of geopolitical factors influencing the developments in the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf, with a particular emphasis on the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia within the framework of futures studies. This is because contemporary scholars believe that, through the scrutiny and evaluation of influential factors in geopolitical transformations, it is possible to predict future events. This not only aids in reducing regional tensions but also facilitates proper regional planning for the realization of a desirable future.

Indeed, futurology, approached scientifically, entails the examination of probabilities, preferences, worldviews, and the underlying myths that shape them. It is a facet of the social sciences dedicated to comprehending future occurrences and prescribing corresponding actions. Futurology is characterized by a systematic and organized approach, integrating planning knowledge, the process of conjecture, and the anticipation of future developments. Contrary to a one-off endeavor, it thrives through recurrent cycles of review and repetition, where previous hypotheses are either substantiated or invalidated, giving way to novel hypotheses.

Furthermore, futurology predominantly serves as a tool for policymaking. Its objectives and undertakings are categorized into six groups: formulating perspectives, discerning priorities, recognizing emerging technologies, disseminating information through education and publication, fostering networks, and cultivating a culture of future-oriented thinking. This interdisciplinary science encompasses a diverse array of approaches, enhancing the decision-making process (Ghalibaf and Gholami,2022:31).

In essence, future research allows us to anticipate and plan for potential future benefits or threats. This has become a focal point for numerous countries in recent years.

3-1.A Classification of World Regions in Geopolitical Theory

The politics of controlling strategic spaces and places was initially pursued by Portugal, Spain, and later Britain, France, Netherlands, and Russia following the European Renaissance. At the time (1506), the Portugese Kingdom had launched its unprecedented armada towards the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

Nevertheless, the pioneers of this realm of politics which sought control over regions and later larger spaces were the former Persians whose ministeral legacy was carried on into the post-renaissance era by major European authorities and their far-reaching naval fleets all the way up to the nineteenth century and the entire twentieth century when this sort of politics was proffered as geopolitical theories of geographical-spatial control.

The following is a list of geopolitical theories directly pretaining to the south western regions of Asia. Herein, a most notable figure whose theories allude to four major regions, one of which is called the asymetrical state is Cohen. In his geopolitical theory, Cohen mentions three assymetrical states that existed prior to the cold war, namely: the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and equatorial Africa (Cohen,2008:85).

Table (1): A Portion of Geopolitical Theories Relevant to this Study

	Theory	Theorist	Characteristics
1	Spatial Control	Mackinder	Mackinder presumed that power was grounded in the heartlands of Eurasia and his views on power were primarily land-oriented.
2	Rimland Regions	Spykman	Spykman believed that the actual opportunities for power were found in the borderlines of Eurasia and naval forces were a primary gateway to global power.
3	Geopolitics of the World System	Cohen	In his theory, Cohen investigated the power relations between primary agents (actors), the constituting components of the international system, spatial structure, and dynamic factors of a system in the form of power distribution patterns.

(Source: Cohen,2008)

3-2.Political Geography and Regionalism

Regionalism can be interpreted as an entanglement of different groups of people and particular regions under the premise of nationalism. The primary subject of regionalism can be viewed as the matter of identification in

political geography. Regionalism can only be discerned with respect to a larger unit of land; one as far reaching as a political system.

There is also a significant cognitive dimension to regionalism through which regions are envisioned on structures of trust, identification, and/or common values that seep into cognitive entities of land, making it possible to identify where transnational borders are drawn. Such regional visualizations employ different tools for transforming specific spatial characteristics into actualized entities that eventually become efficient.

Alternatively stated, regionalism is a sort of “awareness of others” as part of a plural identity that operates as an analytical topic to centralize different research endeavors on positioned actions, cultural terms, common sense in relation to knowledge, procedures, resources, or political projects and variable groupings, all of which can be aligned with secondary territorial ties.

John Agnew established peer group identities as essential to substantiating different regions, since regionalism is recognized in the form of the limited territorial ties among groups, that assemble at different scales. Societal perception and sentiment, as a common notion among regional groups, oversee the emersion of a sense of regional identity. Yet, this narrative which mostly emphasizes cultural issues in the way of regionalism is criticized by certain scholars.

Besides the effects of common sense among peer groups on regionalism, some believe that the development of a regional identity, which is comparable to national belonging, tends to expand further and unlike a national identity, the regional identity is principally older and in most cases understood as an objectivity and necessity for high quality of life or social coherence in a particular region (Dirksmeier,2021:3).

A geographical region can only be recognized as comprehensively geographical and set apart from other regions as the links of its constituents are distinguishable. From a physical standpoint, a region is an integrated environment, or in the least maintains a homogeneity in geographical and strategic characteristics. Even without such physical resemblances, a geographical space may be considered a region provided that a hierarchy of different cultural, political, and economic factors exist among its constituent parts, which sets it apart from other environments (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012:180).

Hafeznia's states on the matter of region and its various forms and dimensions: a region is essentially a part of geographical space from the earth's surface which is structurally and functionally homogenous and differentiated from its surrounding regions in terms of structure and function. Geographical regions are identified based on certain structural features such as space, climate, language, religion, culture, civilization; or other functional attributes like: production, economic, social, communicative, cultural, and political performance, etc (Hafeznia, 2006:58). Overall, political geography classifies regions into two categories: the first refers to different large-scale geographical regions in the globe which can also be mentioned as macro-regions; the second is relatively smaller in size and dimensions and often recognized as a subdivision of another surrounding country (Gallagher and et al,2011:228).

Some experts of political geography and regional studies believe that the prerequisite to a complete and dynamic regional system includes a series of steps and procedures in a larger process of evolution, which starts out as a regional structure. Haggett argues that a regional structure is spatially an organized structure that manifests as a regional organization in the processes of coalitions and unions between countries (Haggett,1996:416).

From the standpoint of political geography, regionalism is one of the means of affinity between nations and governments that demonstrates itself in different scales of military, politics, economy, and even culture (Zarei, 2015:11).

It can ultimately be concluded that the ongoing state of global political geography has hastened the rate of regional convergence, particularly in terms of economy, with the outlook on 21st century being one of a regional system (Biniazi,2012:11).

According to chronological experts, a geopolitical region evolves into a geopolitical structure, wherein regional and non-regional political forces become active and processes of convergence, divergence, conflict, contention, cooperation, and interaction can further develop. Moreover, geopolitical structures can evolve and set the scene for regional organization under conditions that the active political forces in a geopolitical structure, be it internal or external, find common grounds for collaboration and mutual dependency and understanding of regional affairs based on structural and functional features within the region.

In other words, it starts the local and international role-playing, the periphery minorities are affected and move toward politicization and being organized; the coreperiphery relations are promoted and the influence area of the center is expanded to the periphery regions and the religion finds geopolitical nature (Ahmadi,2010:70).

Table (2): Conditions for Convergence

Conditions for Regional Convergence or Organization	
1	Irrefragible Social Ties
2	Economic Growth in all or some Territories
3	Sufficient Political and Official Capacities
4	Compatibility of Mutual Political Values
5	Attendance of Political Experts and Actors in the Field
6	Mutual Interests in Convergence
7	Cpacetic Post-Convergence Living Conditions
8	Religious Ties

(source: Zarei,2015:132-with some Minor Changes)

3-3.The Onset of Neo-Regionalism

One must bear in mind that the old notion of regionalism is unquestionably different from its current readings. To put differently, albeit regionalism has lasted more than eight decades, its various impressions tend to differ in the course of time:

1. Traditional regionalism was congruous with the existing bipolar system, whereas neo-regionalism is commensurate with the multipolar or rather multidimension world of today.
2. The governing organization over regionalism throughout the last decades was essentially disposed to a top-down complex under the ordinance of two leading world powers.
3. Economic cooperation was generally closed or boycotted in traditional regionalism, whereas neo-regionalism is extensively open to collaborations beyond a regions borders.
4. The two poles in the traditional regionalism system included security and economy. However, contemporary classifications and newer systems touch upon topics of security, politics, economy, environment, etc.
5. Any member or political unit in the neo-regionalist system is granted its own specific position in the global structure, while not considered independent by other members of the same region. Yet, cooperation as

understood among the poles of the traditional regionalist system was merely casted as a matter of formality, with no leeway for other members to display their position in the world structure. Moreover, given the benefit of economic collaborations, neo-regionalist systems will most likely suffer less damage in the face of international economic downfalls and recuperate at relatively faster rates, in addition to the eminent efficiency of distributing wealth in order to regionally expand commercial transactions and thereby homogenize income (Karimipoor,2002:45).

It is also important to note that some regions in the current state of regionalism still lack a type of mutual security, albeit the governing countries have achieved a prosperous regional system. Case examples of such regions include ASEAN free trade area, NAFTA, ECO, ... all of which are absent of any security objectives (Zarei,2015:21).

Overall, regionalism gained momentum in the early stages of the 21st century and went on, as stated by Sariolghalam, to be recognized as an alternative to globalization, meaning that countries prioritize the regions where they live and prefer to minimize security issues among themselves and spiral towards economic growth. This way, nations can regulate and lock consumption and investment markets against one another to attain sustainable peace (Sariolghalam,2012).

3-4.Globalization and Neo-Regionalism

To accurately and comprehensively understand the international system requires an extensive grasp on and suitable analysis of the existing patterns in international political economics, with respect to the most pivotal transitions in the last few decades: the phenomena of globalization and regionalism.

Globalization is analagous to circumstances upon which activities in one part of the world can significantly impact other populations. In opposition to globalization, nations pursue the altenrative of regionalism .

And so considering, the primary reasons why regionalism is preferred over globalization are :

1. Greater mutual interests at the regional scale
2. Smoother coordination
3. Regional convergence assuring greater interests

4. Mitigated conflicts and reduced tension leading to regional peace and stability
5. Maintaining balance is easier and more feasible at the regional scale as opposed to international levels (Zarei,2015:23)

Since the 1990s, the topic of regional integrity became the center of attention in various academic spheres and was studied at larger scales. The majority of studies focused on the processes of regionalism and promoted strategies for building integrity on the basis of not only political and economic motives, but also a collection of ideas, standards, values, beliefs and perceptions. Current strategies of regionalism are mostly underscoring those shared beliefs among participating members that have now become a primary focal point and upon which the actors tend to act .

In general, regionalism is expected to set a somewhat favorable frame on the future of economy and politics, with ideal features that promote and positively influence foreign affairs for the countries involved in a target region, all the while ensuring an integral mindset, one that unifies nations (Izotov and Obydenkova,2020:3).

3-5.Cultural Identity and Regional Cohesion

Converging towards common interests and shared cultures is among the most effective and appraised forms of convergence in today's world. A context which facilitates this regional convergence and mitigates actions towards regional organization is built on numerous capacities that allow the emergence of a regional system with common interests, mutual trust arising out of religion, culture, shared values, history and geography (Zarei, 2015:28).

In this light, considering that the identity of the Islamic revolution and Islamic republic is one of culture, ideology, and politics and whose political vita is entirely dependent on maintaining these conditions and state of affairs, any attempts at regional convergence in the Islamic world and the golden strip of The Middle East ought to be implemented with respect to the cultural aspects of Iran and its ideological characteristics.

Nevertheless, this aspect has yet to gain principality in resolving existing problems and preceding discussions, interactions, cooperation, and regional convergence. A case example in this regard is Iran's attempt at forming a strip of Persianates in the southern and central regions of Asia, which

despite their unique and historically rooted identity and culture, bared practically no fruits in the end.

3-6.Regionalism Impacts on Globalization

Regionalism is essentially a byproduct of economic nationalism and globalization, signifying at a mutual reinforcement taking place between regionalism and globalization. Alternatively put, by entering into regional economic and commercial unions, governments can foster increases in their competitive and conjunctive powers as well as growths in national product, so as to appear at higher capacities in the global scale. However, the negative outcomes of regionalism on global systems include :

1. Diminished governmental obligations of accepting global standards
2. Disparate external effects of regionalism
3. Multiplicity of new rules and regulations
4. Regionalism advertises global obstacles; and
5. Changes the natural course of free trades causing economic damage and dwindles in political endorsement of multi-dimensional systems.

On the other hand, regionalism can be a guide towards globalization and accelerate its maturation, as it:

1. Removes the traditional gap between developed and developing countries.
2. Fosters the social culture required for participating in global interactions.
3. Allows smaller-scale countries a position of display in the region and increases regional bargaining power in multidimensional and global negotiations.
4. Increases the volume of inter-regional trades as opposed to intra-regional commerce, not to be misconstrued as necessarily an exacerbation of global trades, since inter-regional trades act not to replace intra-regional commerce, but seek to increase interests in both markets.
5. Increases cross-border commerce and investment given its basic reliance on trade markets. In other words, regionalism is from this perspective a smaller-scale version of globalization, since regions are geographically limited.

3-7. Constitutional Proceedings of Regional Systems

Regional systems are the coherent or non-coherent sum of participating governments which maintain relatively congruent structural elements and attributes with visible and hidden bilateral or multilateral relations, who are themselves subordinate to higher balanced aggregates (totalities) involved in bilateral or multilateral communications. To state differently, the independent national governments involved in an organized regional system tend to waive a degree of governance over objectives of creating a powerful transnational institution (Hafeznia and Kavianirad,2009:59).

Regional order is often achieved via four stages and regional systems which qualify as international regional organizations usually consist of numerous patterns of interaction as so:

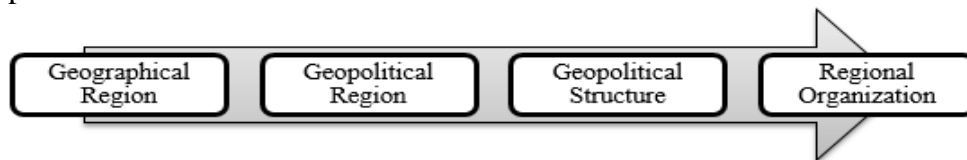


Figure (1): The Process of Forming Regional Organization

(Source:Hafeznia and Kavianirad, 2009:75)

4. Methodology

In the present study required data gathered via interviews with experts of the field. The statistical population comprises experts with a scientific background in military and defense matters, encompassing high-ranking commanders, managers, researchers in scientific and research centers of the armed forces, and professors specializing in international relations and political geography at the University of Tehran. These individuals were chosen through purposeful sampling, resulting in a sample size of 30 experts. The Delphi method (Landeta,2006:470) was used for identifying future driving forces of the geopolitical region of Persian Gulf, after documentary studies. The Delphi study included a questionnaire based on impressions made from the documentary study, which was handed to the selected experts. The answers to these questionnaires were then collected and summarized and redistributed to the experts again in order to attain an overall consensus of the study variables. Structural analysis was also employed via MicMac software for identifying effective factors on the future of the geopolitical region of Persian Gulf. The software provides various outputs on the direct and indirect effects of impactful and sensitive

variables, which can ultimately be used to determine the key variables for future purposes.

5. Study Area

Southwest Asia has long been a major geographical zone in various traditional texts and comprises some of the most significant independent study regions. Recent literature considers Southwest Asia as encompassing parts of the Caucasus, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, sectors of central Asia, Iraq, Turkey, border countries of the Persian Gulf, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and at times Egypt (Salimi,2009:127). However, academic organization and research centers around the world along with universities and political agencies, each give a different definition of this geographical zone based on their own perceptions and viewpoints and at times the national interests of their corresponding countries. For instance, a research project by Yale University introduces Southwest Asia as shown in the figure below, whereas the zone is colloquially known to encompass the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, Caucasus, Asia Minor, the Persian Gulf, and a large segment of the Middle East. Such views of Southwest Asia are also evident in healthcare and immigration programs sanctioned by the United Nations (Macfarlane,2008).

Alternative official texts and even encyclopedias remove Central Asia, Caucasus, Pakistan, and Afghanistan from their definition of Southwest Asia, and only consider this region as composed of Iran and parts of the Middle East (as defined in classic and traditional views), Hijaz peninsula, and the Persian Gulf. Figure 4 shows maps of Southwest Asia as defined in such official texts.



Figure (2): Classical Texts' Delineation of Southwest Asia

Iran Geopolitical Association defines Southwest Asia as:

All independent countries located in the south west of Asia (19 countries) including Iran, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine (Israel), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrein, Kuwait, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia (Iran Geopolitical Association;2008). The association has also published a map of the region as shown below (Figure 3).

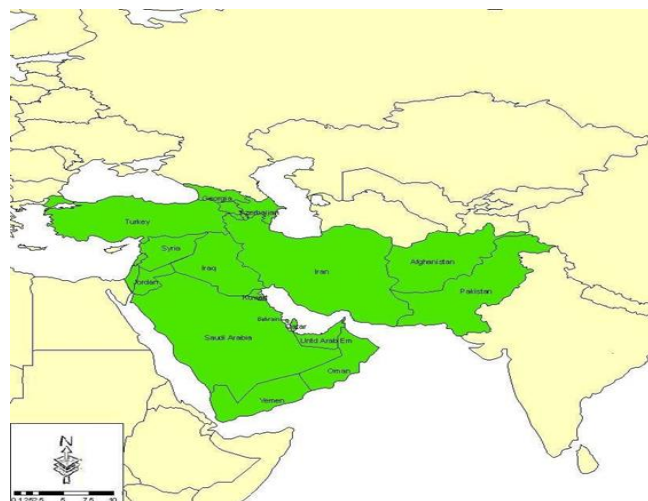


Figure (3): Southwest Asia as Delineated by Iran Geopolitical Association
(Source: Iran Geopolitical Association,2008)

Southwest Asia is a peninsula surrounded by international waters. From the south the region has a border with the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea; from the southwest it reaches the Red Sea; from the west the area is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea; and from the north it is margined by the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The peninsula's only inlet into dry land is located in its east and north eastern parts where it leads to the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia (Ghorbannezhad,2013:164).

5-1.The Persian Gulf Geopolitical Region

The Persian Gulf region includes eight countries of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrein (Comb and Harvey,2004:190), extending to approximately 29500 miles square in area and comprising nearly 63 percent of the world's petroleum reserves. As of now, 41 percent of global petroleum needs are supplied by the Persian Gulf, and expected to increase to 65 percent as recently stated by the United States Department of Energy. In addition to petroleum, the Persian Gulf makes up roughly 30 percent of the world's gas reserves, ranking second after Russia as the top supplier of Gas in the world. Given its abundance of natural and mineral resources, the Persian Gulf is no longer considered as merely an intermediary for commerce between the eastern and western worlds, but is emerging as one of the major hubs for global economic trades. The region is also of utmost importance given its primary role in delivering petroleum to the west. Over 25 percent of the world's oil supplies are transferred from this region, making it a significant target for capitalist systems, with America at its apex. And so considering, any threat to the security of the Persian Gulf is a security threat to the entire global system, granting it a strictly geopolitical status.

6.Research Findings

At this stage of the research, the selected experts of the field were asked to give their opinion on the study subject. To this aim, the Delphi method was used to identify the primary variables affecting the future of the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf with an initial search among selected experts involved in the research topic. The target experts were given questionnaires about the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf, of which a total of 35 variables were extracted into 3 general categories (geo-economic,

geopolitical, and security drivers) as the primary variables affecting the geopolitical region. These variables were further analyzed using MicMac software. Interaction analysis is used to predict the impact (or probability of impact) of one variable on another to finally obtain the sum of all mutual effects (Hosseini and et al,2021:140). Along this line, the French economist Michel Godet introduced MicMac structural analysis as a means for strategic futurology (Gorane and et al,2012).

Table (3): Key Factors and Influential Drivers Affecting the Prospective Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf

Geo-Economic Drivers	Geopolitical Drivers	Security Drivers
Oil and gas trades	Cultural differences	Stable security for Iraq
Transit of goods	Territorial and border disputes	Arms races
Currency relations	Environmental issues	Terrorism
Establishing shared markets	Legitimacy crisis	Extreme Islamism
Labor exchange	Nationalist ideas	Proxy wars
Maritime cooperation	Influence of great powers	Weapons of mass destruction
Agricultural cooperation	Rentier governments	Presence of foreign powers
Tourist collaboration	Sovereignty	Water shortages
Single-product economy	Inter-regional conflicts	Islamic awakening
Economic dependency	Religious ties	War on drugs
Transregional partners	Neighboring regions	
	Probable exodus of the US	
	Ingress of Israel	
	Ingress of China	

6-1.General Analysis of the System Environment

As mentioned in the Delphi method above, a total of 35 variables were identified and clustered into 3 categories as the primary affective factors on the future of the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf. Interaction or structural analysis was then employed using MICMAC software in order to extract the principal components affecting the future of the study environment. A 35 by 35 matrix was used to represent the weighted mutual effects of each variable on another ranging from 0 to 3. All involved variables in the geopolitical region of Persian Gulf were considered as a structure or network of entangled elements, whose mutual interactions were analyzed to obtain the most effective parameters.

A total of 2 iterations were used to find the mutual influences of each variable with a filing rate of 79.35%, indicating a scattered distribution of variables affecting the future of geopolitical study region. of the total 972 assessable correlations found in the matrix, 253 were valued (weighted) at zero, 435 had a value of one, 401 showed a value of two, and 136 were valued at three. The final matrix was 96% optimized with respect to statistical indices and 2 data iterations, indicating the high justifiability of the questionnaire and the corresponding answers provided. Further analysis of the overall system environment and identification of key factors and influential drivers was also carried out, after which a pairwise comparison matrix obtained via Delphi-oriented meetings among managers (30 in total) was used to assess the mutual impacts of each variable on another.

Table (4): Mutual Influence Matrix

	1: Oil and ga	2: Transit of	3: Currency r	4: Establishi	5: Labor exch	6: Maritime c	7: Agricultur	8: Tourist co	9: Single-pro	10: Economic d	11: Transregio	12: Cultural d	13: Territoria	14: Environmen	15: Legitimacy	16: Nationalis	17: Influence	18: Rentier go	19: Sovereignt	20: Inter-regi	21: Religious	22: Neighborin	23: Probable e	24: Israel	25: China	26: Stable sec	27: Arms races	28: Terrorism	29: Extreme Is	30: Proxy wars	31: Weapons of	32: Presence o	33: Water shor	34: Islamic aw	35: War on dru		
1: Oil and ga	0	2	1	3	1	3	0	0	3	2	2	0	1	0	2	0	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	3	3	2	3	1	2	1			
2: Transit of	2	0	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	1			
3: Currency r	1	2	0	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	0	2	1	2	1				
4: Establishi	3	1	2	0	3	2	2	1	2	1	3	2	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1				
5: Labor exch	1	1	1	2	0	2	2	2	3	1	0	2	2	0	2	0	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0				
6: Maritime c	1	2	1	2	2	0	2	1	3	2	1	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	1	2	0				
7: Agricultur	0	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	0				
8: Tourist co	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	1	3	2	1	2	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	0			
9: Single-pro	3	0	1	2	0	1	2	2	0	3	3	1	1	1	2	0	2	2	3	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	0	1	1				
10: Economic d	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	0	3	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	2	3	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1				
11: Transregio	3	2	3	3	1	2	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	3	1	2	1	2	3	1	0	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	2				
12: Cultural d	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0				
13: Territoria	3	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	3	0	0	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	0	2	1			
14: Environmen	3	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	1	1			
15: Legitimacy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0			
16: Nationalis	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	0			
17: Influence	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	3	3	1	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	3	1	2	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	1	3	1		
18: Rentier go	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	3	1	0	2	3	1	2	0	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	2		
19: Sovereignt	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	3	1	2	3	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	3	2	1	2		
20: Inter-regi	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	0	1	1	3	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	2		
21: Religious	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0		
22: Neighborin	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2		
23: Probable e	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	3	2	2	3	1	0	0	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	3	0	1	0		
24: Israel	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	3	1	1	3	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0		
25: China	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	3	0	1	0	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	
26: Stable sec	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	3	2	0	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	
27: Arms races	3	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	0	3	1	3	3	2	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	0	2	3	2	2	2	0	2	1	2	
28: Terrorism	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	3	3	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	0	2	1	2	
29: Extreme Is	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	
30: Proxy wars	3	1	1	2	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	3	0	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	0	2	0	2	
31: Weapons of	2	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	3	0	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	0	3	0	2	0	1	
32: Presence o	3	2	2	3	2	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	3	0	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	
33: Water shor	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	3	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	
34: Islamic aw	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	
35: War on dru	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

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6-2. Influence and Dependence Analysis

The stability or instability of a system can be assessed according to the distribution of variables on a scatter plot. Interaction/structural analysis in MICMAC software accounts for two types of distribution in total; i.e. stable or unstable. Stable systems have an L-shaped distribution of variables, indicating that some variables emanate high influence while others are highly sensitive. Variables in stable systems are generally categorized into three classes:

- A) High impact variables (key factors)
- B) Independent variables
- C) Output variables (resulting variables)

The position of each factor in a stable system is clearly specified. On the other hand, variables in unstable systems are dispersed around a diagonal, creating a complex angle where variables alternate between dependent and influential parameters, making the identification of key factors extremely difficult (Godet, 2003:21). Variables in unstable systems fall into one of the following categories:

- A) Influential variables
- B) Bilateral variables (risk and target variables)
- C) Regulatory variables
- D) Dependent variables or the system results (outputs)
- E) Independent variables

As shown in the scatter plot for affective parameters on the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf, the system status is unstable. Variables fluctuate between two states of influence: direct and indirect effects, as explained in the following.

6-3. Direct Influence and Dependence Assessment

The direct effects of the study variables were assessed and quantified via correlations found in MICMAC software. As shown by the findings and in the table below, the distribution status of variables affecting the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf indicate an unstable system, consisting of four parameter categories (bilateral, regulatory, sensitive, and independent variables) as explained further in the following.

Table (5): Direct Mutual Effects of Study Variables

N°	Variable	Total Number of Rows	Total Number of Columns
1	Oil and gas trades	60	56
2	Transit of goods	57	34
3	Currency relations	57	39
4	Establishing shared markets	65	64
5	Labor exchange	51	41
6	Maritime cooperation	64	44
7	Agricultural cooperation	47	28
8	Tourist collaboration	54	38
9	Single-product economy	49	53
10	Economic dependency	53	39
11	Transregional partners	65	45
12	Cultural differences	19	25
13	Territorial and border disputes	43	55
14	Environmental issues	31	12
15	Legitimacy crisis	22	55
16	Nationalist ideas	24	24
17	Influence of great powers	66	64
18	Rentier governments	50	52
19	Sovereignties	44	62
20	Inter-regional conflicts	59	66
21	Religious ties	19	45
22	Neighboring regions	21	31
23	Probable exodus of America	51	49
24	Ingress of Israel	50	62
25	Ingress of China	55	56
26	Stable security for Iraq	39	53
27	Arms races	60	54
28	Terrorism	49	65
29	Extreme Islamism	48	62
30	Proxy wars	54	64
31	Weapons of mass destruction	53	58
32	Presence of foreign powers	55	64
33	Water shortages	39	18
34	Islamic awakening	37	47
35	War on drugs	35	21
	Totals	1645	1645

6-4. Bilateral Variables

Bilateral variables are those sets of variables that show higher dependence and higher influence compared to other parameters and any alteration on these variables will cause chain reactions in other variables (Moosavi and et al,2016:15). The position of these variables in the scatter plot is located to the upper right section. Bilateral variables show a significantly high amplitude for transforming into key factors of the system. Such variables are often divided into two categories of risk and target. In the case of the present study, the bilateral variables as derived from the influence-dependence scatter plots are: oil and gas trades, transit of goods, currency relations, establishment of shared markets, maritime cooperation, single-product economy, transregional partners, presence of foreign powers, influence of great powers, rentier governments, sovereignties, inter-regional conflicts, probable exodus of America, ingress of Israel, ingress of China, territorial and border disputes, arms races, terrorism, extreme Islamism, proxy wars, and finally weapons of mass destruction.

6-5. Regulatory Variables

Regulatory variables are often exposed around the center of gravity of the influence-dependence map, and have the potential to transform into influential or bilateral variables (Rasooli and et al,2021:162). The following is a list of regulatory variables identified in this study: economic dependency, labor exchange, tourist collaborations, and agricultural cooperation.

6-6. Sensitive Variables

These include variables often distributed at the lower right section of the influence-dependence scatter plot, also known as the resulting (output) variables. Output variables have a significantly high dependence and significantly low influence in the system. As for this study, the following parameters were identified as sensitive variables: Islamic awakening, stable security for Iraq, legitimacy crisis, and religious ties.

6-7. Independent Variables

Independent variables are located towards the lower left sector of the influence-dependence map (Javanshiri,2021:75) and in the case of this study include the following: water shortages, war on drugs, environmental issues, nationalistic ideas, neighboring regions, cultural differences.

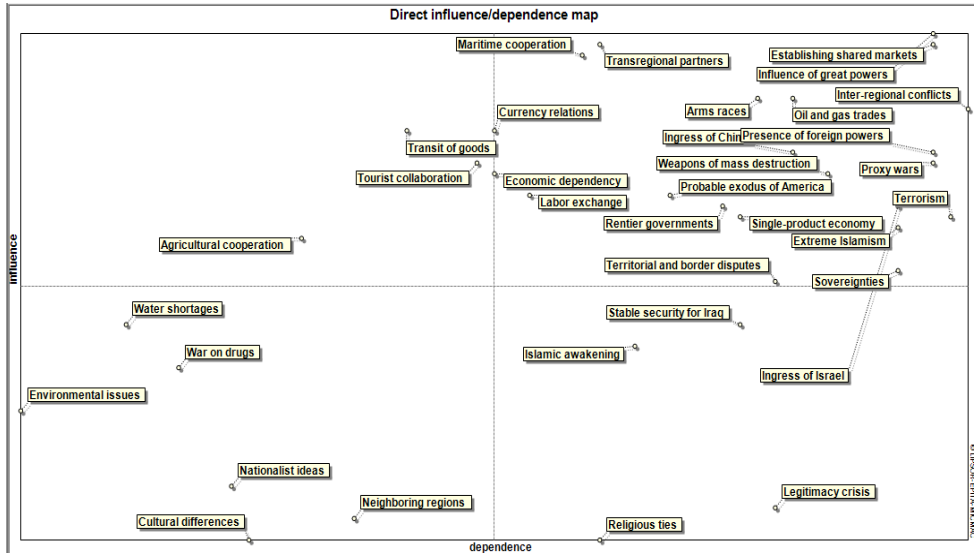


Figure (4): Classification of Study Variables based on Direct Changes

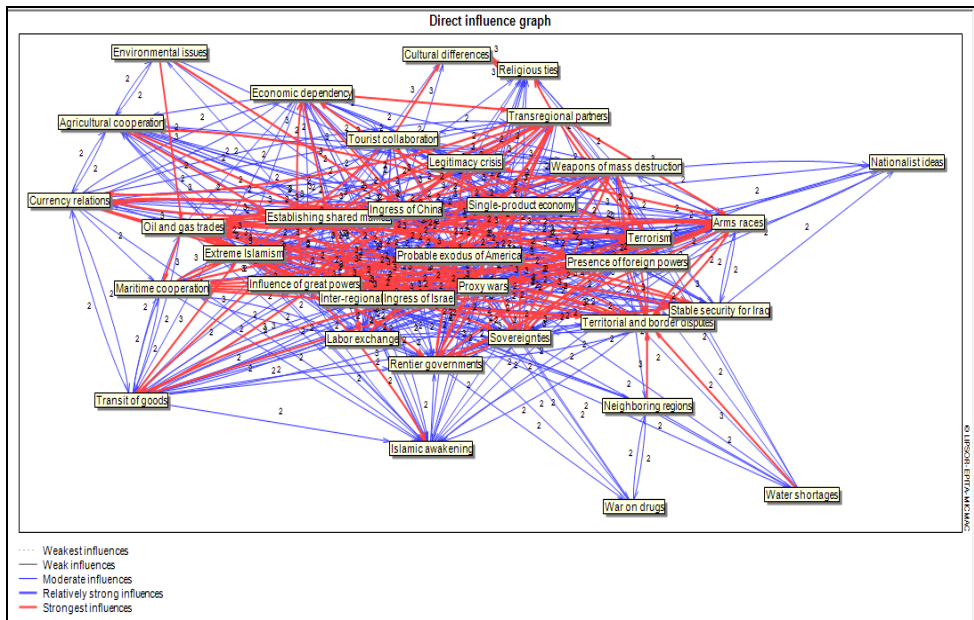


Figure (5): Direct Influence-Dependence Map of Variables (Significantly Weak to Significantly Strong Changes)

The above diagram shows the network of relations between variables as derived from MICMAC software.

6-8. Assessing Indirect Influence and Dependence of Variables

For this method of assessment, the relations between different variables were increased to the powers of 2, 3, 4, 5, ... in order to measure the indirect effects of variables. The indirect effects scatter plot for variables affecting the future of the Persian Gulf geopolitical region were identified in a similar fashion to the corresponding direct effects of variables as:

- 1- Bilateral variables (risk and target)
- 2- Regulatory variables
- 3- Sensitive variables or system outputs
- 4- Independent variables

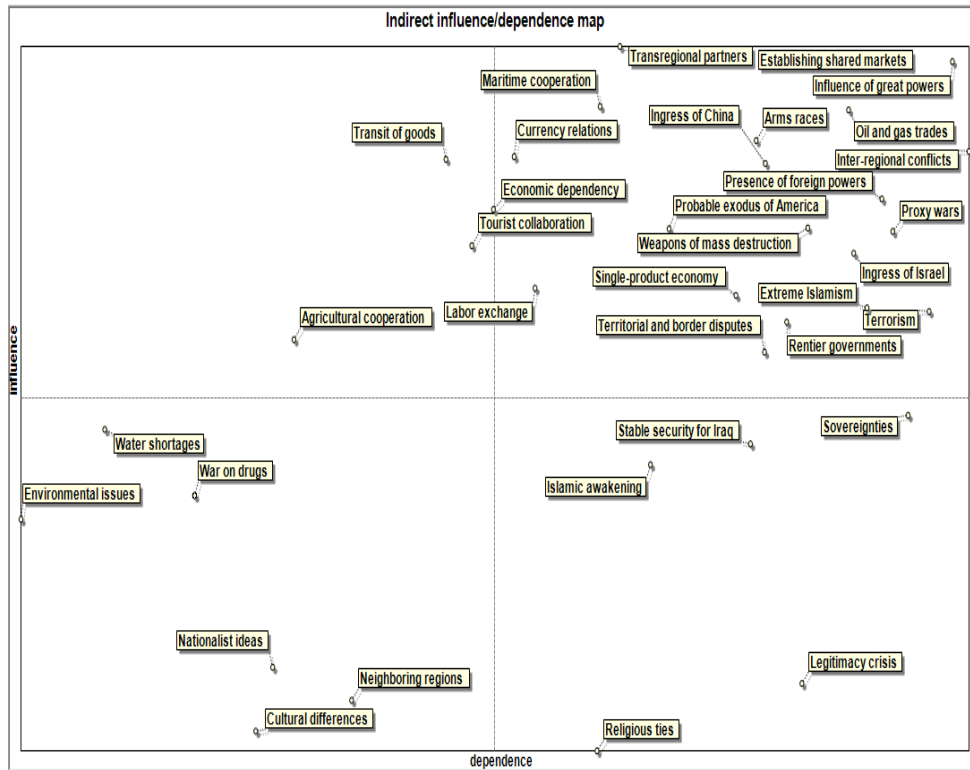
Findings on direct and indirect effects show that the abovementioned variables showed the least amount of change and displacement when assessing indirect effects of variables, as shown in the map and table below for indirect effects of variables.

Table (7): Indirect Mutual Effects of Variables

N°	Variable	Total Number of Rows	Total Number of Columns
1	Oil and gas trades	150186	143160
2	Transit of goods	141692	87023
3	Currency relations	142159	96525
4	Establishing shared markets	154277	152574
5	Labor exchange	119553	99435
6	Maritime cooperation	150776	108517
7	Agricultural cooperation	110708	65836
8	Tourist collaboration	126845	90622
9	Single-product economy	118298	127457
10	Economic dependency	133082	93644
11	Transregional partners	161082	111274
12	Cultural differences	43362	60508
13	Territorial and border disputes	108539	131435
14	Environmental issues	79799	27789
15	Legitimacy crisis	51556	136644
16	Nationalist ideas	54351	62863
17	Influence of great powers	158508	157624
18	Rentier governments	113725	134523
19	Sovereignties	97654	151469
20	Inter-regional conflicts	143053	159956
21	Religious ties	39957	108078
22	Neighboring regions	48661	73870
23	Probable exodus of America	129757	118121

N°	Variable	Total Number of Rows	Total Number of Columns
24	Ingress of Israel	125550	143866
25	Ingress of China	140981	131555
26	Stable security for Iraq	92733	129477
27	Arms races	144920	130270
28	Terrorism	115534	154383
29	Extreme Islamism	116123	145728
30	Proxy wars	129281	149310
31	Weapons of mass destruction	129917	137474
32	Presence of foreign powers	134869	147789
33	Water shortages	95239	39466
34	Islamic awakening	89192	115537
35	War on drugs	83868	51985
	Totals	1645	1645

Figure (6): Indirect Influence/Dependence Map of Variables



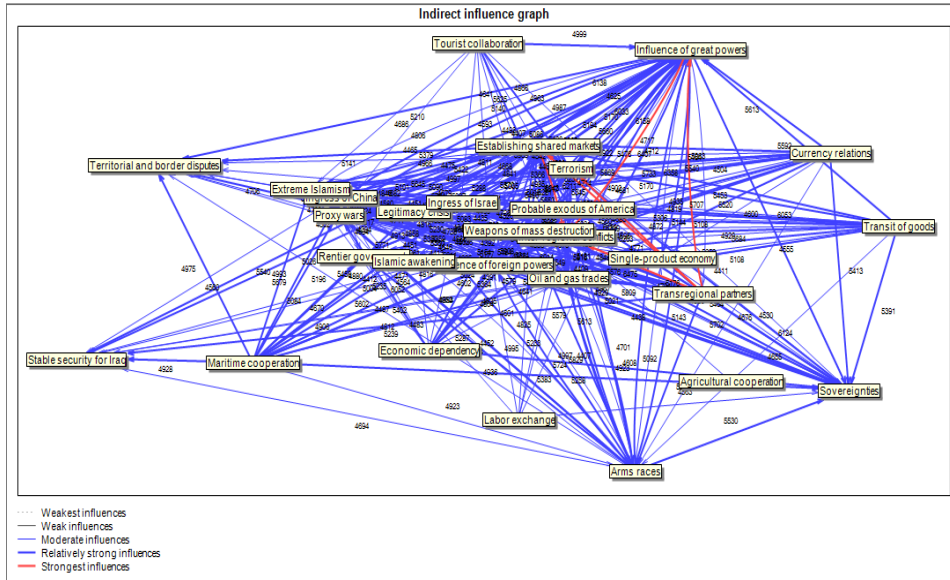


Figure (7): Indirect Relations between Variables (from Significantly Weak to Significantly Strong)

6-9. Displacement Maps for Direct and Indirect Effects of Variables

The figure below depicts the amount of displacement in factors in terms of direct and indirect effects. As evident, the degree of displacement exerts no significant effect on changes in the position of factors.

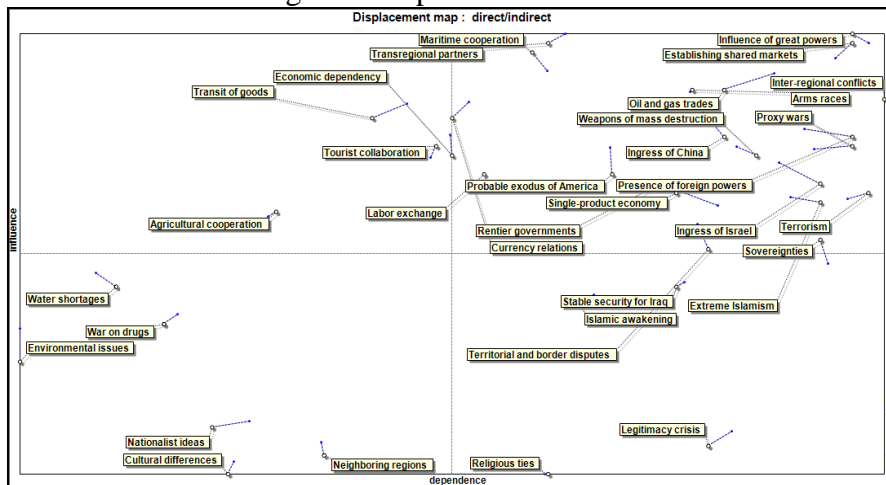


Figure (8): Displacement Map for Direct and Indirect Effects of Variables

6-10. Status and Position of Factors Affecting the Persian Gulf Geopolitical Region in MICMAC Map

This section includes an analysis of the state of factors involved in the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf along with an overall analysis of the entire system with respect to the 35 factors identified in the earlier sections and their previously discussed effects, of which 10 factors were ultimately extracted as the key factors and influential drivers for the geopolitical region of Persian Gulf. These 10 factors existed in both direct and indirect analysis of effects and weighted according to the table below:

Table (8): Key Affecting Factors (Direct and Indirect Effects)

RANK	VARIABLE	DIRECT INFLUENCE	VARIABLE	INDIRECT INFLUENCE
1	Influence of great powers	401	Transregional partners	405
2	Establishment of shared markets	395	Influence of great powers	398
3	Transregional partners	395	Establishment of shared markets	388
4	Maritime cooperation	389	Maritime cooperation	379
5	Oil and gas trades	364	Oil and gas trades	377
6	Arms races	364	Arms races	364
7	Inter-regional conflicts	358	Inter-regional conflicts	359
8	Transit of goods	346	Currency relations	357
9	Currency relations	346	Transit of goods	356
10	Ingress of China	334	Ingress of China	354

As demonstrated in the aforementioned table, the pivotal factors and driving forces that impact the geopolitical landscape of the Persian Gulf region can be systematically categorized as follows: Transregional partners, Influence of great powers, Establishing shared markets, Maritime cooperation, Oil and gas trades, Arms races, Inter-regional conflicts, Currency relations, Transit of goods, Ingress of China. Consequently, the strategic consideration of these pivotal determinants facilitates the pursuit of sustainable development within the Persian Gulf region across a spectrum of geopolitical scenarios. Additionally, the accompanying diagram visually represents the relative significance of these driving forces within the geopolitical landscape of the Persian Gulf, delineating their direct and indirect impacts.

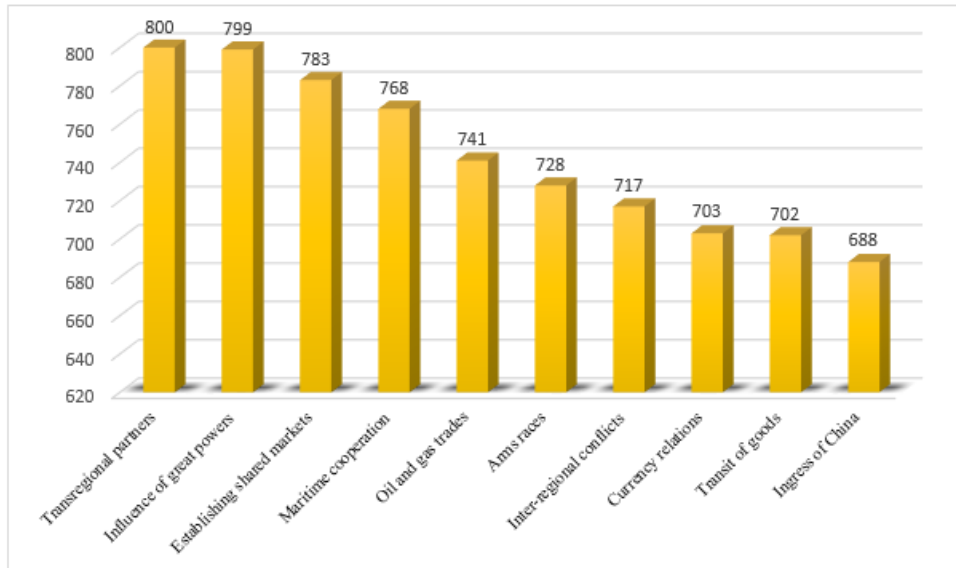


Figure (9): Highest Ranking Influential Factors along with Weights Assigned as the Sum of Direct and Indirect Effects

For both cases of direct and indirect effects, the influential drivers showed higher weights compared to other effective factors and therefore play a more significant role in the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf.

7. Conclusion

As evident in both history and geography, geopolitical relations between Iran and neighboring countries of the Persian Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia as one of the primary power figures in the geopolitical region of Southwest Asia, have always been beset by myriad of challenges and except for few instances in history, when these relations were somewhat mitigated and promising of progress, the overall stature on these geopolitical connections have been inconsistent and undesirable, particularly due to pernicious interventions by foreign powers. The present study sought to investigate the various causes and grounds for segregations and tensions between countries of the Persian Gulf geopolitical region particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia, while accounting for prosperous patterns of regional cooperation and interaction in other geopolitical regions of the world to identify and assess underlying factors of integrity and plurality between involved countries in a region. Expert opinion was also used along with new

and improved models of decision making for the futurology of current circumstances. The primary objective of this attempt was to identify and prioritize the principal components influencing the progress of relations between Iran and neighboring countries of the Persian Gulf geopolitical region, especially Saudi Arabia. The main assumption of the study was that conditions in the Persian Gulf region could change for the better provided that an irenic form of convergence is achieved between neighboring countries based on commonalities and mutual needs; a form of convergence that allows the region to progress in various aspects and at the same time constitute further progress for the governments involved so as to reach the highest levels of welfare for citizens.

A review of the relevant literature on convergence and divergence between Iran and neighboring countries of the Persian Gulf points to the primary factors of divergence as inclusive of ideological territorialization, particularly by Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main authorities in the region, as well as destructive interventions by the US and Israel and assertions on segregation instead of commonalities.

As other researchers believe, any attempt at convergence and advancement of relations between countries of the region without any attention to semantic structures of the two governments and proceedings involved will render inefficient. Furthermore, promoting ideological issues in the region will provoke further segregation in aspects of economy and security, while economic collaboration can act as a key gateway to developing strategic relations in other areas of interest and thereby increase convergence.

The present study identified 35 factors affecting the future of Persian Gulf geopolitical region, classified as: geo-economic, geopolitical, and security drivers. The most effective components among these factors were extracted via interaction/structural analysis via MICMAC software.

The first step after identifying the variables was creating the pair-wise comparison matrix for Delphi sessions with managers (30 in total) in which the pair-wise effects of each variable was obtained on another.

As previously mentioned, the stability/instability of a system can be checked via the distribution and scattering of variables in the obtained maps. The distribution map also clarifies the position of each factor and its role.

As the findings showed, the bilateral variables with high dependency and influence were gas and oil trades, transit of goods, currency relations,

establishment of shared markets, maritime cooperation, single-product economy, transregional partners, presence of foreign powers, influence of great powers, rentier governments, sovereignties, inter-regional conflicts, probable exodus of America, ingress of Israel, ingress of China, territorial and border disputes, arms races, terrorism, extreme Islamism, proxy wars, and weapons of mass destruction. The regulatory variables identified in this study included: Economic dependency, labor exchange, tourist collaborations, and agricultural cooperation. These variables are capable of transforming into highly influential or bilateral variables.

The dependency factors identified in this study with significantly low influence on the system were: Islamic awakening, stable security for Iraq, legitimacy crisis, and religious ties. Finally the independent variables classified in the study included: water shortages, war on drugs, environmental issues, nationalistic ideas, neighboring regions, and cultural differences.

The highest degree of direct influence as determined via the MICMAC software was assigned to the following factors: influence of great powers, establishment of shared markets, transregional partners, maritime cooperation, gas and oil trades, arms races, inter-regional conflicts, transit of goods, currency relations, and ingress of China. On the other hand, the greatest proportion of indirect effects were allocated to: transregional partners, influence of great powers, establishment of shared markets, maritime cooperation, gas and oil trades, arms races, inter-regional conflicts, currency relations, transit of goods, and ingress of China.

Overall, the key factors and influential factors affecting the Persian Gulf geopolitical region were, in order of magnitude: transregional partners, influence of great powers, establishment of shared markets, maritime cooperation, gas and oil trades, arms races, inter-regional conflicts, currency relations, transit of goods, and ingress of China. Endeavors which focus on these factors will evidently affect the geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf. As the study suggested, an agreeable and constructive image of the future of relations between Iran and countries of the Persian Gulf, particularly Saudi-Arabia requires joint endeavors and outlooks on various components and variables of economics, neighboring regions, tourism, environmental issues, agriculture, energy cooperation, maritime cooperation, attenuated influence of great powers (western), promotion of currency and bank-based relations,

and increased transit of goods, operating through China as a proper intermediary force. It goes without saying that certain attitudes including arms races and anti-security operations must be prohibited and averted by the selected countries.

8.Acknowledgements

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