

Re-constructing the Political Mindset of the Persian Gulf Security

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Abstract

Persian Gulf region is one of the most strategically important regions in the world. The presence of its large oil and gas reserves coupled with some of its most vital water routes to international movement of merchandises would require well coordinated and transparent policies by which all littoral states including other regional and extra- regional state actors should actively involve. In order to maintain the free movements of oil and other commodities, it is necessary that the security of the Gulf is stable. This article examines security perceptions and priorities of the littoral states of the Persian Gulf region. Long-standing mistrust, foreign intervention as well as varying national priorities which prevent them from reaching consensus to establish a stable collective security. Finally, the article recommends that there is a need to re-construct the political mindset of Persian Gulf security so everyone can enjoy the benefits the region offers to humanity.

Key words: Collective security, Gulf Cooperating Council (GCC), Regionalism, Political mind-set, Arab littoral states, Persian Gulf.

Abstrak

Rantau Teluk Parsi adalah satu dari rantau yang paling strategik di dunia. Di rantau ini wujud simpanan minyak dan gas dan juga perairan laut yang utama kepada pergerakan perdagangan antarabangsa yang memerlukan dasar yang selaras dan telus di mana semua negara pesisir termasuk pemain rantau dan juga bukan rantau yang sepatutnya turut terlibat. Untuk menjamin pergerakan bebas minyak dan komoditi lain, adalah perlu keselamatan Teluk adalah stabil. Artikel ini memeriksa persepsi dan keutamaan Negara-negara pesisir di rantau Teluk Parsi. Ketidakpercayaan yang wujud sekian lama, intervensi luar dan juga pelbagai keutamaan nasional yang menghalang mereka daripada mencapai musyawarah untuk mewujudkan sebuah keselamatan secara kolektif yang stabil. Akhir sekali, artikel ini mencadangkan perlunya untuk merekonstruksi semula minda politik keselamatan Teluk Parsi supaya semua orang akan dapat menikmati apa yang boleh ditawarkan kepada kemanusiaan.

Kata kunci: Keselamatan kolektif, Majlis Kerjasama Teluk (GCC), Keserantauan, Minda politik, negara pesisir Arab, Teluk Parsi.

1. Introduction

One of the most important considerations in analyzing the future direction of international relations is to look at how individual states define priorities in order to respond to old and newly emerging security challenges. Today, the notion of security has been experiencing a significant conceptual transformation and a state could no longer be able to solve security issues alone. Non-traditional security problems emerged in the forefront which require immediate coordinated responses not just by a state or a group of states but by all actors who have a stake in their outcomes. Pressing security issues such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, global warming, food crisis, and energy crisis are some of the issues that require multilateral approaches and instruments. These security issues also required an organization to be more inclusive in type rather than exclusive, in order to maximize the possibilities of cooperation and favourable outcomes.

The complexity of the security issues requires politicians and parties involved to revisit the traditional thinking of security. Political leaders are required to re-think whether past decisions were effective enough to bring economic and political stability to their own country and to the region or whether they failed to do so. The need to reconsider and re-construct the old security mind-set to appreciate and better respond to the contending security issues of time is of priority. This is how the picture of the Persian Gulf security system comes into our discussion in this paper.

2. Theoretical framework

Realism regards a state as a “unitary rational actor” in international politics and any decision it will adopt has to be based on its perceived “interests.” In view of this, “survival” in an anarchical system is an important determining factor of a state’s struggle for power in which “self-help” determines the “principal of action in an anarchical system where there is no global governance” (Timothy Dunne 2001:110). In short, every political leader has to exert all efforts to make sure his country’s interests will best serve under any favourable circumstance. Trust is somehow not in the menu of inter-states relations. Every leader would tend to believe that only interests are constant and that friendship and cooperation are temporal.

In the Persian Gulf region, distrust and suspicion prevail as dominant factors in inter-Arab and intra-regional cooperation. Some historical evidences show that despite a wider regional call for cooperation and dialogue, the idea of territorial conquest, exchanges of politically damaging propaganda, militarization and suspicion on the real intention of every country’s policies and priorities continue to dominate in many political, security and economic agenda in the Gulf littoral states. In the early 1980s, Iraq imposed war on Iran and in 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In addition, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, littoral Arab countries have started to keep their distance from Iran. One reason for this is that Iran’s Islamic government called the neighbouring Arab countries to “emulate Iran’s

revolutionary model” and severe relations with the United States- “the Great Satan” (Ray Takeyh 2008:4). The situation mentioned above together with Iran’s ambitious nuclear program has worsened the prospect for security cooperation in the Gulf.

Arab Gulf leaders are too pre-occupied in believing that neither Iraq (during Saddam Hussein’s time) nor Iran can be treated as honest and a reliable partner. The Gulf Cooperating Council (GCC), whose membership excludes Iran and Iraq has manifested a negative cognition on the real intention of the two countries. For GCC members, strengthening relations with the United States can be more beneficial both in terms of economic gain and security protection than to completely trust Iran and Iraq whose intentions are questionable. Besides Iran is a regional power. With a strong army, big demographic potential and huge energy reserves, littoral Arab states cannot help but to seek security protection from the United States to counter what they perceived as the biggest “threat” coming from Iran. On the other hand, Arab littoral states could no longer trust Iraq-a country with almost having the same power as Iran. The Iraqi imposed war on Iran and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait created an impression that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was more dangerous than Iran.

The Arab negative perception on Iran did not however start at the height of the 1979 Islamic revolution but rather a case that can be traced from the ancient times where the Sunni-Shi’a dichotomy started to emerge (The Arab American News 2008). This negative perception continued through time and is carried out by generation to generation of Arab leaders. The perception which has been triggered by the failure to determine the real intention of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a nuclear- capable state aggravated distrust and suspicion to its highest level against this country. Third parties headed by the United States and its European allies are also party blamed by politicizing the Iranian nuclear programs and by making it the center of regional and international security concern.

The dominance of Western media in consistently “organizing core disinformation campaigns,” (Michel Chossudovsky 2005:173-175) and in aiding the demonization of Iran in portraying the country as the main source of threat in the region and in the Persian Gulf in particular opened the way towards the creation of new *alternative Islamic paradigms* that are more hostile to western style-governance. It also boasts of the political legitimacy of the Islamic Republic not only in the eyes of those who disapproved western -styled democracy in the region, but also in the eyes of those who resisted their own de-facto and corrupt governments that supported a pro-western policy. Noah Feldman argues, “for more than a decade after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, many Islamist sought to emulate the Iranian model by Islamizing their own countries through the revolutionary transformation of violent jihad” (Noah Feldman 2003:7).

Negative ‘perception’ which centers on the application and interpretation of ‘value,’ ‘belief’ and ‘cognition’ against other state-actors in the Persian Gulf region has been indoctrinated in the mentalities of many Arab leaders in the Gulf. Such scenario is dangerous because it entails security suspicions, rivalries instead of cooperation and dialogue over how to establish a security regime in the Persian Gulf. This situation also brings vulnerability into the GCC members because excursionist extra-regional powers may take advantage of the

situation, thus, making the regional security condition more complicated. Mistrust, suspicion and fear may result in a 'security dilemma' (John H. Herz 1950:157-158) by which a state actor has to arm itself to increase its military strength or to enter into alliance with another actor in order to counter- balance the military build up of the neighbouring states- even if no states desire for conflict or war (Jones Walter 1991:223).

Evolving approaches to international relations today may offer an alternative solution to how this perception of insecurity can be minimized and eliminated in the long run. What is therefore needed is a creation of a revolutionary idea that would require re-thinking of the situation- such as something that considers the fundamental structures by which state-to-state relations are based not solely on material considerations but more importantly on socially constructed norms. In his article, *International Security in the Post-Cold War Era*, John Baylis, a professor from the Department of International Politics of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, explains the importance of a '*constructivist* ' *critical theory*.' He argues that although constructivist theory is a family of theories and not a single one, they however, share commonalities. One is that 'the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material' - whereas the other commonality says that by 'changing the way we think about international relations can bring a fundamental shift towards greater international security' (John Baylis 2001:2004-2005). Critical theory in international relations explains that state and individual behaviour can still be changed and in contrast to realism, it supports the need of international institutions to affect this change (Steven C. Roach 2007).

If Persian Gulf Arab leaders look at the security of the region in a new dimension by which security is not solely defined within geo-physical frameworks such as the control of energy and strategic waterway but also through ideas, then the possibility of reconstructing a new way of thinking about the security of the Persian Gulf, whereby all actors –Arabs and Persians, -can be accommodated is also possible. This accommodation can only be shared once a sense of direction is achieved by which regional actors continue to talk to build trust while at the same time identifying potential commonalities and differences. Although the participation of the people from the grass roots is important in this process, it is undeniably given in the political system in the region that, religious and political leaders have a greater stake in achieving this accommodation and cooperation. It is also important that an institution like the GCC should be given a collective role to put forward strategies for Persian Gulf security.

By common interests and differences, regional actors can develop a new paradigm which will help them facilitate the construction of ideas and eventually lead to the formation of commonly accepted knowledge and practices while at the same time achieving resource cooperation. Thus, the notion of 'self-help' to achieve security will be replaced by a 'collective security' (Nicholas O. Berry 1991:381) by which members of the Persian Gulf region can possibly practice the idea of 'one for all and all for one,' (Hans Morgenthau 2006:435) and thus, achieve greater security interdependency.

3. Regionalization and the Persian Gulf security aspect

Regionalization is one important phenomenon in international relations today. It manifests human beings' determination to look for an alternative solution to the limitedness of resources both in the aspects of materials and knowledge. Yet the process of regionalization is not an easy one. It took more than fifty years for the European countries to create a most successful union (European Union) from a simple European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1950s (Encyclopedia Britannica). It also took many years for the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to deeply reconcile and implement common aspirations and work for the promotion of common values and interests (Ralf Emmers 2003:10-39). Until recently, EU is facing an issue of whether it will expand its memberships in terms of geography, or whether it will deepen its foundations by which European values will be given more importance. Both the material, historical and cultural values are all necessary considerations to understand how far regional groupings such as the EU have been successful. As Fiona Butler argues, "regionalism requires not merely geographical proximity and increased economic interdependence for its promotion. Other factors were also important in underpinning potential development of regional problem-solving process. Historical experiences, power and wealth distribution within and outside the groupings, cultural, social and ethnic traditions, and ideological or political preferences can be central to understanding why and how actors perceive regional solutions as desirable" (Fiona Butler 2001:409-428).

Using this definition, it will be easy to understand why the GCC has evolved and why until today it has not covered all littoral states in its membership. Iran, and Yemen are not members up to now and Iraq was expelled from the Council.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in 1981 to "coordinate policies and mobilize members" capabilities in facing "security challenges in an unstable regional environment, like the Gulf area" (Global Security). This sub-regional organization is "characterized by significant security interdependencies between its member states" (Mohamed 2011). This can be encapsulated in Buzan and Waever's theory of "regional security complexes" (RSC) which define "a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Waever, O., & Buzan, B. 2003:43). It should be noted that at the time the Council was created, it coincided with the beginning of the Iraq-Iran War. It was also created as a collective response to the perceived threat from the newly established Shi'a Islamic government in Iran. Given these two considerations, the creation of the Council was aimed at protecting the status quo of the Arab littoral members in the Gulf from the spread of the Iranian Islamic revolutionary ideology to the region, and secondly, to protect Arab interests from the Iraqi-Iran war by supporting Saddam Hussein against Islamic Iran. Hence, it became clear that religious identity interests (Sunni-Shia dichotomy) and the exclusive sense of *Arabness*, *had both* played the pivotal role in creation of the Council.

Needless to say, the Persian Gulf crisis that took place in 1991 by which Iraqi President Saddam Hussein advanced its army to invade Kuwait, was another turning point in the Council's existence. It brought a significant shift in the Council's security policy

priorities. It expelled Iraq from the council (Ali Mousavi Khalkhali 2011) and declared President Saddam Hussein persona non-grata (unacceptable). Iraq invasion of Kuwait was a turning point by which other members of the council became careful in dealing not only with Islamic Iran but also with adventurous members such as Iraq. In order not to demoralize other Council's members, the decision was agreed upon to expel Iraq from membership. This time, political consideration was important in determining the dismissal of Iraq from the council.

In the case of Yemen, it can be argued that the delayed acceptance into the Council has something to do, not so much on cultural values as Yemen is an Arab and Muslim country, but on the country's "population, its economic situation, and the political and security instability in the country" (Asharg alawsat 2010). Yemen's membership in the Council can bring more benefits to Yemen than Yemen's material contribution to the Council. Unlike its neighbouring Arab countries- Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirate (UAE) and Iraq, Yemen, does not have an impressive economic record. Nor its political structure is stable as it has been shaken by many Yemeni rebellions that challenged the existing status quo of the government. Yemen is currently in "negotiation for GCC membership and hopes to join by 2016" (Yemen Times December 2006).

Regarding Iran's approach to regionalization, Kayhan Barzegar, a renowned Iranian scholar argues that the inclusion of a regionalist approach in Iran's foreign policy "is the key to realizing Iran's national and security interests." However, such regionalist strategy must be based on a careful calculation of "various geographic-geopolitics, historical-civilizational, and political-security approaches of Iran's foreign policy. It should also be centered on establishing relations with various geographical regions and political-security and economic sub-systems." (Iran Review 2010). Keyhan Barzegar's argument does not only call for Iran to open to its Arab neighbouring countries in the Gulf but also to other sub-regional and regional organizations. This is very realistic since the Middle East region, as Wang Bo argues, "has more diversity than similarity" and that "the region lacks common characteristics and compromise," while "the nations in the region also differ greatly from each other in their understanding of the national threat and national interests"(Bo Wang 2008:73-81). The Iranian position in the regional and sub-regional power structures and regional problems must be given an important consideration.

These differences of perceptions and values have resulted to a more focused militarization projects than sub-regional or regional initiatives to lay down competitive economic plans for the future generations. If Iran will be included as a normal member of the GCC, it will definitely contribute to the lessening of tension since members will attempt to coordinate their security interests and hence more collaboration than confrontation will be the possible outcome.

4. The extra-regional powers and the de-securitization of the gulf

Nowadays, there have been a lot of reports about super powers' intervention in the Middle East region. Since the collapse of Soviet Union in early 1990s, the focus of power competition shifted from a merely ideological one to a more economic driven competition wherein, the importance of strategic resources such as oil and gas have all played a

significant role in power politics. The triumph of capitalism after the Cold War has further intensified this assertion. Countries in the world with the same values, cognition and perception on certain political and economic events, try to cooperate with each other to guard common interests.

Power resources are not equally distributed among countries in the world, yet, some countries, namely: the United States, European Union, China and Japan have the monopoly of modern technology, strong economic base, capital investment and powerful companies, while few countries have military superiority over others. This uneven distribution of resources allows an ambitious country to set its own policy in a foreign land where its perceived “interests” are at stake. During the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union were competing with each other over the control of strategic regions such as the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. They both expressed the “willingness to use military forces overseas” to “make, maintain, or unmake foreign governments” (Michael G. Roskin, Nicholas O. Berry 1999:62). Powerful countries such as the US and Soviet Union can create an imaginary threat, exaggerate the presence of threat, and sometimes create threat to demonize the host government that the threat is imminent and must be stopped. And since the host government does not have a strong army or a stable government, it resorts to inviting a third country to guarantee its security. As a response to this, an invited country exerts its influence over the domestic and international affairs of a host government. It proposes what the host government should prioritize. And as a result, it creates a sense of dependency to such an extent that it could not stand in its own without the interference or help from the invited country in times where domestic and regional problems occur.

The Persian Gulf is the “axis and the center of center” (Asgar Jafari Valdani 2005:7) of the world. Because of this, imperial powers had found this region as an important route to reach their colonies in Asia and the Pacific. While the region has become the center of world’s energy resource rivalries, the access to the body of water is also a very important source of national power especially when air transportation system was not yet prominent at that time. With the discovery of oil in the Persian Gulf in the early 20th century and the widely use of oil to run industrialization in Europe and elsewhere in the world, the control of this vital strategic commodity has become a priority not only by consuming countries but most significantly by powerful countries in the world. Control of this resource could mean, influence, prestige and superiority of one county over another. As Chossudovsky pointed out the “war on terrorism” and the “militarization of the vast regions in the world” are in line with consolidating “American empire.” In addition, these are aimed at ‘re-colonizing’ not only China, countries in Central Asia but also Iran, Iraq and the Indian peninsula. These mean an American corporate control of the vital oil and pipeline routes along the Eurasian corridor (Michael Choddudovsky 2005:116-120). Not only the United States but also regional ambitious power such as Iraq (during Pres. Saddam Hussein), demonstrated the intention to gain control of the vast Kuwaiti oil reserves when it launched military invasion to Kuwait in August 1990. Control of Kuwaiti oil fields could mean ‘Iraqi’ s control of over 200 billion barrels of oil- about one-fifth of the world’ s total commercial oil reserves,’ and to a greater extent could weaken OPEC (John E. Spero and Jeffrey A. Hart 1997:298-300).

A former Iranian parliamentarian and professor of Political Science at the University of Tehran, Saideh Lotfian argues, various disputes that have been experienced by Persian Gulf littoral states are 'exacerbated by the interventions of the extra-regional powers' which have made regional states deprived to 'create a viable security system' (Saideh Lotfian 2007:1-42). The diversionary strategy of any extra-regional powers in the Persian Gulf has deprived littoral countries to the concept of collective security realization. The realization of a collective security must be "reinforced by political transformation, which provides the underlying stability-a kind that both fosters and depends on meaningful reform-that is the missing in the Gulf" (Andrew Rathmel, Theodore Karasik and David Gompert 2003:2).

One could only assume that had it not be in the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf to world economy, the realization of the littoral states to collective security would had been realized. Although, the Sunni-Shi' a dichotomy and various tribal conflicts in the Gulf continued to be the possible causes of insecurity, they are, however, not enough to explain why they have not come up into a collective security system which includes Iran and other Arab littoral states.

It can be noted that the GGC is a sub-regional grouping which was created out from the new security challenges after the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. This organization has failed to recognize that relative security relies not only on the security guaranteed by the United States but most importantly on the inclusion and participation of all littoral states in the Persian Gulf. Although the process of inclusion in the Council is difficult to achieve given their historical experiences with the Iranians and former Iraqi Bath regime, they can however continue to engage in dialogue to identify not only their common interests but also differences so that in the long run they will be able to craft a carefully designed policies toward each other based on mutual trust. Dialogue boasts confidence-building and once confidence is realized then the missing link –trust, which disconnects the Arabs from Iranians, will be achieved.

From the time Britain withdraw from the Gulf in 1971, the United States took the responsibility of protecting friendly Arab regimes and making sure that oil flows uninterruptedly to the Western world. The US government spends billions of dollars in military aid to secure Arab authoritarian regimes in the Gulf. The practice of tolerating these regimes from human right abuses runs counter to what the United States has ideally been advocating in the region. The idea of promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East in general led many scholars around the world to accuse the United States of practicing a double standard policy (Asian Tribune 2007). This policy further exacerbated old security issues in the region. It incited not only anti-Americanism but also weakened the legitimacy of the de-facto and pro-Western Arab leaders from the eyes of their own citizens. Furthermore, it encouraged fundamentalist Muslims from other counties in South East Asia and Africa to hate and targets civilian westerners.

The idea of democracy and promotion of human rights has been very controversial in the Persian Gulf countries. It remained in the paper and had never been fully adopted nor implemented both by the political elites and the people. In addition, Western powers have never forced pro-western Arab elites to fully adopt democratic values. Asian Times reported

on December 21, 2007 that, “*the United States is most effective in promoting liberty and human rights when people around the world believe it is rising above narrow self interest to defend universal ideals. If, instead, the U.S. government’s rhetoric about democracy is seen as a weapon it uses only against its enemies, people around the world become cynical about everything the United States does in the name of freedom. Under such circumstances, dictators in countries like Iran or Cuba can deflect U.S. criticism by arguing that it is selective. Dissidents in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia doubt that the United States is really on their side; they suspect it is using its freedom agenda to mask other ends, and they are less willing to be associated with U.S. democracy programs*”(Asian Tribune 2007). In his recollection, Noah Feldman says that, while the President George W. Bush called for overhauling the Palestinian authority and while some American officials including democrats call for the “need to create democracy in a post-war Iraq, American policy has far done little to discourage Muslim autocrats from keeping their democratic opponents at bay” (Noah Feldman 2003: 10).

The Americans have known for sure that regime change in the region, could mean a disaster. It could mean a decapitation of American interests in the region which have been protected by the de facto friendly Arab leaders. Any move to democratize countries in the Gulf could mean an invitation of other groups such as those who may advocate nationalist or Islamic fundamentalist ideologies and those who may have anti-imperialist agenda to participate in the local and national elections. Thus, a victory of the later may result to an adoption of a policy that may be detrimental to American interests in the region.

Regional political realities these days are however different from the Cold War era. If the aims of the United States intervention in the Gulf was primarily driven by securing a free flow of oil from external threats and discouraging the Soviet Union from expanding its sphere of influence in oil rich portion of the Gulf, today’s challenges do not merely come from outside the region. It come from within the region and from within a particular country. It may not only come from nationalist and Islamic fundamentalist groups but from particular individual citizens of these countries who have no ideological inclination but who have simple resentment against the ruling elites. The recent popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and some countries in the Middle East are the concrete manifestations of these claims.

New regional challenges demand new approaches. One may notice that the arguments by which the United States always cited, as to why it needed to be present in the region, have not been much changed, these are: security of the oil supply, protection of the American allies, regional security, and nuclear non-proliferation programs in the region.

Barbara Corny, a foreign analyst at the Cato Institute argues that the so called US “vital interests” in the Middle East is really not vital in a real sense. It only incurred American public to a costly spending which, she argues, “entails great risk of drawing America into regional conflicts” (Barbara Corny 1994). It is worthy to note that the United States does not import oil from the Middle East more than Japanese, Chinese and European allies. Beside, how can Americans protect the Gulf Arab states from imaginary threats coming from a regional country when the origin of threat is not from outside but from inside as the result of political, economic and socio-cultural dissatisfactions? How can it genuinely

broker regional peace when it is a party to many security problems in the region? (Barbara Corny 1994).

The American government together with its European friends have been the contributors in the massive military acquisitions in the Persian Gulf since the Cold War. This massive military build up of conventional weapons have been identified as the main source of regional insecurity. From Iran and Iraq to Saudi Arabia and other small Gulf littoral states, conventional arms build up becomes an integral part of their security apparatus. Small arms can be easily acquired and carried by lawless elements. They can easily be smuggled out of the country to carry rebellion against the existing government. Washington Post reported, “the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are leading a region with military build up that has resulted in more than \$25 billion in arms purchases in the past two years alone”(Washington Post 2010). This purchase is probably aimed at counter-balancing Iran’s growing conventional arsenal (Washington Post 2010).

Military build up in the Gulf created a spiral security problem by which other neighbouring countries are forced to arm. Although the concern about the eradication nuclear proliferation in the region has been debated much, some regional countries such as India, Pakistan and Israel, acquired nuclear weapons without a staunch criticism from the US government. One thing for sure is that the United States finds these countries “responsible’ and “cooperative” to the US government. Unlike Iran, these three countries have all supported and cooperated with the US government’s campaign on combating international terrorism.

Iran has been repeatedly denying the military use of its nuclear program. Iran argues that its nuclear program is intended for civilian purposes and it feels “its rightful position as a leading power in the Gulf has been denied,” (RAND Issue Paper 2003) yet, the United States and other member of the international community, counter-argued that Iran’s intention is to transform this nuclear program into a military bomb, hence, Iran is a threat to the security of the Persian Gulf and Middle East in general. The US accusations on Iran can be understood from a fact that since the establishment of the Islamic government, it has strained diplomatic relations with the United States and it categorically rejected American imperialism in the region. Iran’s Islamic government does not recognize the US role in the regional peace negotiation between Israel and Palestinian as genuine nor does it acknowledge US presence in the Persian Gulf as constructive to regional security.

There are worries that Iranian nuclear programs may result to nuclear competitions among regional powers in the Middle East region. Thus, there is a probability then that other countries in the Persian Gulf will go nuclear to balance the imaginary threats from Iran and other nuclear regional countries. Contrary to what are reported in mass media, Iran believes that its nuclear program will serve as an “ultimate insurance policy” from any future attacks of the United States or Israel (Kenneth R. Timmerman 2006:4). However, what are clear and worrisome are not the Iranian nuclear projects, rather the proliferation of conventional weapons which, when use against other country, can possible trigger regional nuclear build up. As Paul Wolfowitz argues, “the key to preventing nuclear wars was to stop

conventional wars (James Mann 2004: 79) and to make sure that all regional countries adhere to international peaceful resolutions in resolving conflicts.

The reality of the plummeting conventional weapons must be addressed seriously by the suppliers and the buyers themselves if they want a genuine peace in the region. Peace cannot be guaranteed by military build up. Since military business is a very lucrative activity, it will be difficult to say that suppliers would stop selling arms to the region for the sake of peace. The United States alone was a leading supplier of arms to the region. It “gave or sold arms to the Middle East than all other arms exports combined totalling more than \$90 billion since the Gulf War”(Anthony H. Cordesman 1999: 85). There are at least three reasons why arms transfer to the region has continued until today: 1) arms sales are an important component of building political alliances, particularly with the military leaderships of recipient country; 2) there is a strategic benefit coming from interoperability of having U.S. manufactured systems on the ground in the event of a direct U.S. military intervention; and 3) arms sales are means of supporting military industries faced with declining demand in western countries”(Joe Stork 2002: 42).

It is clear that the series of wars in the Persian Gulf including the US invasion in Iraq in 2003 and the US-led campaign to combat international terrorism is undeniably a big profitable business by which some corporate Americans could benefit. In anywhere in the globe, the Persian Gulf states can manage to purchase military equipments which they believe necessary for their protection from attack. To sustain this profitable business, it is important to maintain an environment of mistrust and insecurity; it is important that a perceived enemy like Iran in the context of the Gulf security exists. It is important to create an imaginary threat such as terrorism to convince the Gulf States to continue to buy military hardware. And finally, it is necessary to intervene in the name of peace, justice, and development for the region and the international community. This misguided presentation of oneself by an extra-regional power in the Gulf has misled Arab leaders to the extent of sacrificing regional security cooperation.

The United States has tried to maintain alliances with friendly countries in the Persian Gulf. This alliance system between the United States and the six Arab monarchies of the GCC promotes a perceptive insecurity in Iran and thus as a reaction to this, the Iranian regime depicts this ties as a symbol of “American imperialism” by which GCC countries are considered as “puppets of American imperialism.” In this way, Iran has no option but to “continue ... (its) own quest for further militarization” (Stephen Zunes 2003:45).

Under the pretext of moral responsibility, former President George W. Bush invaded Iraq in 2003. The invasion was too timing in such a way that the American public was still mourning the death of thousand Americans who were killed on September 11 terrorist attack in New York. An award-winning journalist and author argues that, “the invasion of Iraq was sold on the basis of fear of weapons of mass destruction” (Naomi Klein 2007: 414). Saddam Hussein was brutal and that it possessed weapons of mass destruction and it harboured terrorists’ figures inside Iraq. In addition, Saddam’s “willingness” and “capability to use these weapons against US citizens on US soils” (Eric Alterman and Mark Green 2004:254) was unquestionable. President Bush in his speech said that that, “The Iraqi regime has violated all of those obligations. It possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons.

It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism and practices terror against its own people. The entire world has witnessed Iraq's 11-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith (Pres. Bush Speech 2002). This public presentation of an 'imaginary threat' had brought the American tax payer to believe that there was indeed a weapon of mass destruction in Iraq. Other members of the international community also supported the "coalition of the willing" to combat international terrorism. And so, as Noime Klaine noted, the "invasion was a success but the occupation was a failure" (Noime Klaine 2007: 419).

The invasion to Iraq was not only designed to topple Saddam Hussein and to control Iraqi oil but also to transform Iraq into a new country by which western style democracy and economic liberalism can be introduced in this vast region of many autocratic regimes. As Michael Ledeen, an adviser to the Bush administration lamented, the aim of the war was "to remake the world" (Noime Klein 2007:415). This means that the US invasion will not only create "the first Arab democracy" in the region but also and most importantly, to bring other countries in the Arab world to embrace Western values. In addition, it also believed by the President Bush team that the Iraqi invasion "represented the advance for the world civilization" (Stephen Pelletiere 2004:131). The invasion however, displayed the modern American military technology and an attempt to show that America was still an undisputed superpower and that it has still the capability to police the world and that it has a "divine" responsibility to maintain and establish peace and security in the world. This display of military might against the Iraqi Army "subscribed to the principle of might makes right" (Stephen Pelletire 2004:131).

Consequently, after many years in Iraq since 2003, the world community has seen little progress in the country. What becomes apparent is the daily bombing of the Iraqi insurgents and militias who are trying to sabotage the American installed government. President Obama himself recognizes that the "war has fuelled terrorism and helped galvanize terrorist organizations. And it has made the world less safe" (Deborah White 2007). This realization is true as many countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia have experienced the challenging threats to security. In various countries in the Persian Gulf region, threats from the localized terrorism are becoming felt by people. Even American forces completely withdraw from Iraq, newly Iraqi government cannot sustain its political stability for as long as the problem about power sharing between the major ethnic groups is not settled. What the Americans have done to the Iraqis was not to make the Iraqi nation free from brutal and ambitious leaders but rather to make this nation more dependent from the Americans.

5. (Mis-) perception on the security arrangement in the Gulf: Arabs vs. Iran vs. US

It can be said that one of the most important components of foreign policy is the ability of decision makers to project their country's interests in the highest and most effective form of strategy. Such condition requires experts to a multi-level approaches in policy formulation. One must consider how actors think and response to certain events while at the same time, he must understand the ability of the actor to utilize all necessary local and national potentials to create and implement rational policy. In short, policy makers must be smart and prompt to take advantage of the events that take place both at national, regional and international levels.

Apart from the history, culture, institutional efficiency, and geography, other human elements such “decisions, behaviour and outcomes” (Marriijke Breuning 2007: 1630) are also very important elements in policy formulation. All efforts to come up with an effective policy are aimed in the name of national interests. This condition may also be applicable at regional and international levels where collective regional and international interests are defined. This part examines how regional actors- the Arab littoral states, Iran and the United States see Persian Gulf security.

The importance of Persian Gulf stability to regional and international economic survival echoes R.K. Ramazini’s simple but critical question , “*who should maintain the future security of the Persian Gulf?*” (Foreign Affairs). The importance lies on a simple consideration that maintaining the security of the Gulf requires not only cooperation among regional actors but also firm political commitments by outsiders who share common interests on the region’s security. Up to this time, Arab leaders in the Gulf are incapable of securing their own countries and the region without alliance from the United States. This sense of dependency suggests that the security of Arab littoral states should be maintained within the security umbrella provided by the United States. The Arabs are so worried that Iraq and Iran, with strong demographic base and army, could disturb the peace and security of the region. Whereas, the United States views Iran as a threat to the security of the Middle East, Iran also views US interference in regional affairs as the hindrance to greater regional security cooperation. This situation captures Amir Sajedi’s argument that, “what jeopardises stability of the region are the different perceptions that Iran and U.S. have regarding the Persian Gulf security” (Amir Sajedi 2009:77-89), while at the same time “the Arab countries in the Gulf do not have common understanding of the Persian Gulf security” (Amir Sajedi 2009:77-89).

Lack of common understanding of the Gulf security dynamics and threats have therefore brought them to adopt different strategies to the extent of sacrificing the possibility of creating what Michael Ryan Kraig refers to as a “stable security system” (Middle East Policy Council Journal 2006) in the region. What is embodied in the regional actors’ strategy is a naive and self-serving interest without looking at the possibility of “compromise” such as entering into a mutually constructive agreement in which both parties may benefit (Middle East Policy Council Journal 2006). Each has wanted to get the most possible gain of what they desires, so that the immediate result is to seek military and security alliances with a hegemonic power to protect the well being of their very existence. This strategy is misleading because the greatest threat that a Gulf member state is now facing comes not from outside the region but from within.

Iran is an “undisputed regional superpower” (Judith Yaphe 2008). Due to its strategic location, Iran has adopted a careful calculation on how it can continue to project as a strong country despite American encirclement through series of alliances with the countries in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and South Asia. In order to pre-empt threats from the United States and maintain its status as regional power, several factors were included in its strategic and military considerations: 1) to re-assert Iranian traditional role as regional hegemon. The clerical establishment believes the country’s ‘natural and historical destiny to dominate the region as well as to lead the world’s Muslim’ ; 2) to enhance military capability to defend itself from military aggression (Judith Yaphe 2008); 3) to diversify its foreign policy

not only towards the western world but most importantly towards the developing countries in Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America; and 4) to be self-sufficient in producing important goods necessary for its survival to pre-empt the impacts of international sanctions on its economy.

Iran perceived regional security as the “sole responsibility of the countries in the region.” In its recent military exercises in the Persian Gulf, President Mahmoud Ahmadnejad has called for a “new security order” in Gulf- an order that does not need the participation of the American forces (Mansharof, Y. & Savyon A. 2010). This declaration has not convinced however many of the Arab countries as it could mean as re-asserting Iran’ s hegemony in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia as an influential country in the region shares the desire and aspiration of other Arab littoral countries in the Gulf in countering Iranian influence (Jessica Drum 2008). The differences of perceptions, interpretations of the nature and origin of security threats prevented these countries from constructing an agreed security mechanism.

A multilateral approach to security is necessary to keep the region away from the damaging security perceptions of the actors involved. This could mean the involvement of all regional actors including the United States and perhaps China, European countries and Japan. Just like their European and American counterparts, China and Japan have regarded the stability of region as vital to their economic survival. Since 1993, China became a net exporter of oil mainly from the Persian Gulf (Mahmoud Ghafouri 2011). China has also been allegedly involved in arms dealing with Iran’s Islamic government in exchange to oil supply (Asia Times 2006). It becomes more active in its bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia and it ventures to African continent in search for energy supply (Cindy Hurst 2006: 4). In the other hand, Japan is hugely dependent in the Middle East oil supply (US Energy Information Administration 2011) whereas, Europe still considers the region as the main source of oil despite new energy prospects in Central Asia.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The title of this article and the subsequent studies revealed that the Persian Gulf security suffered from flawed and short-sighted perceptions of different regional actors and extra-regional powers on what should be the most viable security system in the Persian Gulf. Each country has pursued a blind policy of serving either the interests of oneself or allies (in the case of the US). While others, like the small littoral Arab states (UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Yemen) and Saudi Arabia, have all accepted short-sighted belief that the Gulf security could only be sustained with the presence of the US forces to counter balance the potential threats that may come from regional powers such as Iran and Iraq. The GCC serves as a portal in this insecurity from potential threats either from Iranian Islamic Revolution (Manoucher Mohammadi 1997: 33-35) that took place in 1979 or from Iraqi ambitious and grandiose claim over other territories such as in Iran and Kuwait.

The appetite for Middle East oil and gas led powerful countries, the United States, Europe, Japan, and China to compete with each other over its control. The post-September 11 opened the door of competition to other emerging actors in this rich but fragile region of the

world, thus, bringing new complications to the old unresolved security problems in the region. If during the Cold War, the United States depended so much on its regional allies such as Iran to provide information about the Gulf, today, Iran's Islamic government is in the core of anti-Americanism in the Gulf and Middle East in general.

When Iraqi president attacked Kuwait in the early of 1990s, the United States had quickly responded by convincing the Saudi monarch to prevent Iraq from the possibility of extended attack to Saudi Arabia. Gulf littoral states had shifted their priorities against Iraq and expelled this country from the GCC. The 'U.S.-led Coalition victory in the Gulf War' helped the United States overcome its disgrace in Vietnam and reinstated its position as the dominant world hegemon. Under the security threats from terrorists groups, the US has once again illustrated its military might to eradicate them.

In conclusion, it must be understood that some states in the region have viewed 'regional instability as a strategic tool,' which they hope to exploit to their own benefit. Given this situation, it is therefore difficult to establish a genuine peace and security in the Persian Gulf. It requires a concrete realization that peace, security and development in the Gulf are not given rather, they must be coordinated and established-a condition which made up of interconnected variables wherein one cannot exist without the others.

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