

Persian Gulf position in America's geopolitical point of view

Mohammad Abolfathi, Bahram Moradi, Ali Askar Rezai

Department of Political Science, Razi University, Iran

Abstract: Ending the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union disturbs the geopolitical order of the world and turns the world from bipolar structure into the geopolitical transition phase. At this stage, the United States that had found itself as a just global superpower in various areas (political, economic, military, cultural, etc.) found the arena suitable to expand and continue the hegemonic system by defining new geopolitical context namely the new world order. The country defines particular national interests in order to sustain its hegemonic system all over the world and found its own national security strategy planning. Among these, the Persian Gulf region, having unique geopolitical features such as position, specific human resources, enjoys a special place in the country's national security strategy so that a current American policy in Persian Gulf can be evaluated in the same direction. In this paper, U.S. geopolitical position in the Persian Gulf region and its approach towards the region will be examined via geopolitical perspective.

[Mohammad Abolfathi, Bahram Moradi, Ali Askar Rezai. **Persian Gulf position in America's geopolitical point of view.** *J Am Sci* 2012;8(12):814-819]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>. 113

Keywords: geopolitical transition, geopolitical structure, hegemonic regimes, Persian Gulf

1. Introduction

With the collapse of the socialist superpower, the world's geopolitical balance was disturbed, in one hand a competitive model of the Soviet got rid of stage and on the other hand, liberal superpower remained unchallenged with the same ability as a superpower. Thus, the evolution of the global geopolitical system naturally engaged the mind of authorities' strategic thinkers' mind. But the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia) leaders revealed their own particular reaction to control the power proceeding and coming developments. While each of them saw the other in specific circumstances and unequal situation rather than the other because the competition period is based on the balance of power was ended and the race was abandoned by one of them while others was able to continue the race (Auto tile and others, 1998: 103 quoted from Hafiz NIA). Therefore, it provided USA with a chance to find itself unchallenged as a legatee of competition and fantasize the dream of shaping the new order based on the single authority system (Yetiv, S. A. (1997). Expanding and continuing itself, Hegemonic structure needs a leverage and tools that can take forward the hegemonic power in the United States, because the world moves toward pluralism and economic powers like the European Union and other emerging powers like China and Japan already announce their essence more than past. India also have economic rise, Russia is restructuring its economy and returning to be an effective strategic power. The United States in response to these developments and sustaining its current geopolitical situation is trying to apply all existing hegemonic leverage in the international environment to maintain

its hegemonic stability. The U.S. major hegemonic leverage includes:

- 1 Military – Industrial sector;
- 2 Open economy along with USD superiority among other reputable international exchange;
- 3 Control and having the world's energy resources.

Persian Gulf region having particular potential, including the vast resources of energy, a major consumer market and the petroleum USD cycle via imports of weapons, due to chronic crisis in the region has been able to play a key role for global powers. Above factors cause the region find a strategic place in U.S. national security strategy. So that in order to maintain its hegemonic stability in desired geopolitical structure, use the region as a tool in all Hegemonic leverage. In this paper the geopolitical significance of Persian Gulf was examined according to the U.S. hegemonic leverage and its impact on the each of the leverages and totally on the region's geopolitical weight of world powers.

1 - Hegemonic leverage and investigating Persian Gulf role on them

1-1 The military and industrial sector of United States

Six hundred billion USD U.S military budget in 2007 (Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency: Winter 1386) clearly indicates the importance of the powerful military - industrial sector in this country as well as in Pentagon having military budget equal to other world countries funds. United States enjoys the latest technologies and conventional and non conventional weapons to preserve its absolute military supremacy in the world. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former white house counselor states about the military technology revolution and U.S

military capabilities: "The Soviet challenge obviation was accompanied by incisive represent of U.S. new military technological capabilities in the Persian Gulf War that naturally followed by American people trust to the unique power of the country. Technological revolution in military affairs that the United States was its leader not only creates new weapons and tactics - weapons and tactics that ends to unilateral results in two short –term war of 1991 and 2003 that were imposed on Iraq that was equipped with Soviet Union weapons but also the gave new meaning to American military superiority in the world "(Ross, D. (1984). Funding the military supremacist is mainly on the American taxpayer and selling weapon to other countries, in both cases the Persian Gulf region is important directly and indirectly. In weapons selling, the Persian Gulf region is now a major field for American weapons importer due to acute crisis and current chronic crisis and thus is directly involved in military funding. The tensions between the countries in the region during the Cold War create the great arms race where was considered as the most important place for strategic income of superpowers. So it is worthy to say that the superpowers and trans-regional weapons producer powers were satisfied and happy for the tensions between the countries to develop and maintain the interests obtained from arms selling with the condition of maintain the relative balance between them (Hurewitz, J. C. (1972)).

After cold war, America attempted to misrepresent the threat of Radical Islam or Islamic radicalism as a main risk to region conservative countries or its public thoughts to maintain and continue its benefits and numerous amount of money obtained from weapon selling so that U.S provides a market for its own weapons and attract s public thoughts (American taxpayer), in such a way America creates insecurity and presents the region more unsafe than the reality to gain one of its security leverage from insecurity of Persian Gulf. Exacerbate factors such as rising Arab countries petroleum revenue, regional events and transformation (such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi invasion to Kuwait, Iranian nuclear issue and other new security arrangements in the region) trans-regional (e.g., September 11, 2001 and Afghanistan - Iraq war), has increased the American arms trading process with region Arab countries. So that the military costs was\$ 600 million for Bahrain in 2005, \$ 800 million for Qatar, \$ 5 billion for Kuwait, 3/5 billion USD for Oman, and\$ 20 billion for Saudi Arabia that the major part of these costs was spent on military trading with America. Signing the military and security treaties with all of the mentioned countries, U.S. trains the country's military forces in

lieu of gaining numerous amount of money according to the latest military method and the sale of modern weapons while selling modern weapons (Military Balance 2006). Based on the very accurate research conducted by American historian Joel Benin from Stanford University, the industrial- military sector of America and its powerful supporters in Washington closely cooperate with the great Israel followers, based on this study, Iraq war was the joint product of the "American enterprise" institute in where the powerful supporters of military and petroleum industries have been gathered and the Institute of Politics at the "Near East" in Washington is (Sajedi, A. (2009). Here, clearly the interests of two groups that add flue will be disturbed: American industrial-military sector that have seek the continuation of conflict in the Middle East in one hand and Zionism on the one hand.

1-2 Geopolitical and energy Hegemonism

Energy is as industrial development foundation thus the industry depends on hydrocarbon materials (petroleum and gas) inseparably. This inseparable adherence between energy and power is the base of industry in the twenty first century. Therefore, in power interaction in international relations, predominance on hydrocarbon material production center and their transferring rout especially gas is concentrated in the political future of many today actors (Carlisle, Rodney P. (2003). Thus, energy as a geopolitical variable has a special place in the global system power interplay and energy resources accessibility is strategically important for all levels of the global power hierarchy. Since, the energy (specifically petroleum and gas) is an influencing factor in wealth and power generating in the current world, each of the actors seeks to define its own energy system security position in the world. Today strategists plans the strategic areas strategically based on the rate of gross domestic product, human and natural resources. In the twenty first century, economic wealth and international production systems control, supplying and consumption of economic goods are considered as power criterion and geopolitical and geostrategic regions are coincide with the regions with high natural resources and gross domestic production. In such a trend, countries with large reserves of energy find strategic importance in international politics and strategy and taking advantage of opportunities can enhance their position (Potter, Gary; Sick (2004)). According to Energy Information Administration, American primary demand of energy in the world from 347/7 quadrillion / beta in 2006 by 1/5 percent average annual growth in the basic state will be to 678/3 quadrillion / beta will by 2030 with 95 percent growth (EIA, 2009, Table A1). In high economic

growth with average annual growth of 1/8 percent, by 2030 we will have more than 110 percent growth during the period and it will reach to 733/4 quadrillion / beta, and in the case of high prices of crude petroleum with an average annual growth of 1/4 percent and more than 88 percent growth, it will be 655/8 quadrillion / beta and in low economic growth with annual growth of 1/2 percent and about 80 percent growth, it will be 627/6 quadrillion / beta arrives by 2030 (Ibid, Table C1). National Petroleum Council (NPC) in the United States, in its latest report entitled "hard facing truths about energy," indicates the predicted increasing in world's total energy demand to 50 to 60 percent by 2030 due to world population increasing with higher levels of living standards in developing countries (Holditch, 2008, p 317

It is expected, the import of fossil energy sources increase to 85 percent of total energy imports by 2030 (Kreft, 2006, p 2). Today focus on energy policy go beyond the purely military and the effect of interruption or disruption of petroleum supply and price shocks on economic efficiency and effectiveness will be profound in United States and other major petroleum importers. Now it is accepted that the petroleum crisis of 1970, has plunged the West GDP into recession. This line of reasoning has expanded the new concerns of energy security. Organization of petroleum producing countries (OPEC)¹ report shows that the global petroleum demands will be increasing continually. Accordingly, the growth rate from 2005 to 2030 would be 1/6 percent in average. Growing in world petroleum demand indicates the countries such as China and India respectively have experienced the highest increasing in petroleum demand. On the other hand, the statistics show that the United States, China and Japan respectively have the highest petroleum consumption with 698/20, 855/7 and 051/5 million barrels per day.

America is the world's largest crude petroleum importer. America's dependence on imported crude petroleum from 18 percent in 1960 has reached to 58 percent in 2003 (Gallis, 2006, p 2-6). This country with 419/19 million barrels of crude petroleum per day in 2008 has consumed about 22/5 percent of total world crude petroleum. From this, the amount of 6/736 million barrels per day was domestic production and the rest namely about 12/683 million barrels per day has been supplied through imports. However, the crude petroleum production in America has decreased from 8/011 million barrels per day in 1998 to 6/796 million barrels in 2008. All the proven crude petroleum

reserves in United States has been estimated about 30/5 billion barrels (2/4 percent of global reserves) at the end of 2008 that with current production the life of the reserves will last for next 12/4 years. Thus after 2025, United States must import almost all its crude petroleum requirement from aboard (BP, 2009, p 6-12). Thus, increased petroleum imports as well as its prices, ignoring the import costs, make the costs of American dependence on petroleum heavier. Increasing the petroleum costs causes the country's trade deficit in April 2008 to 60 billion and 900 million\$, despite of 3/3 percent increasing in exports. Reducing the potential GDP along with increasing the cost of property transferring and macroeconomic adjustment costs are costs that American paid for its economy dependent on petroleum.

Therefore U.S. desires to play a special role in the safe and stable transmission petroleum. First, America has the world's largest economy and American market boom will be affected greatly by the stability of European and Asian markets and growing economic convergence between the major poles of world economy. In other words, developing current and new energy sources is mentioned as a fundamental goal for all the world powers. Second, in the last years of the twentieth century, Washington's dependence on imported petroleum rose to historic levels and does not seem to change soon. In other words as a foreseeable future America's dependence on energy sources will be greater than other countries. The high and growing dependence on imported petroleum and gas can lead to serious results for the economic well-being, daily activities and lastly for national security of United States so, U.S. requires petroleum and gas for energy security and energy security for national security. United States clearly has announced its energy ensuring or energy security as main pillars of its national security. In the announcement, which is known as the Carter doctrine, it was stated that if the country's energy security be at risk, United States would avert the threat by resorting force and military ways. American national security is linked to a strong global economy and in this regard one of America's fundamental objectives is energy security. United States should establish its energy security and global economy prosperity in cooperation with its allies and commercial partners as well as energy producers to expand global energy distribution and several available resources. But the cases are not sufficient to show U.S interests and answering the question why U.S want to control crude petroleum flow and strategically important petroleum rich countries via any things including resorting to force and if needed occupying the same countries. American interests in the matter are based on several motivations:

¹ Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

A) Affecting the rate of supply and petroleum prices;
 B) Maintaining the petroleum security dependence of competitors on American security shelter;
 C) Preventing USD to be weakened as the determinant currency against Euro in international financial relations. All studies and forecasts about the world energy situation in future show that the demand for OPEC and the Middle East petroleum will be growing from 2010, the rest of Middle East petroleum resource will constitute about 80 percent of world petroleum reserves in 2020 and 95 percent in 2030 by running out the North Sea, North America and even Russia petroleum. Accordingly the importance of OPEC and the Middle East and Persian Gulf, especially five countries of Saudi Arabia, , Iran, Iraq, UAE and Kuwait will be clear in the world energy supply in future decades. About 67 percent of world's petroleum reserves is hidden in the middle east region that 63/5% of the resources equal to the 730 billion barrels of crude petroleum lies in the Persian Gulf region if Caspian Sea resources is added to these numbers, the natural percentage ratio of the reserves become 70 percent for petroleum and more than 40 percent and for natural gas. These resources are extractable with little cost. A major factor that makes the Persian Gulf petroleum critical to the United States, Western Europe and Japan, is difficulties in replacement of imported region petroleum and gas by other energy resources such as land, solar, and hydrogen. These two features namely the abundance of energy resources and its low costs changed Persian Gulf region to a strategic region for the global economy. The power that grasps Persian Gulf has the strategic leverage that can bring its political target in home in front of its rivals. Besides the direct benefits from accessing to cheap sources of energy, U.S can exploit petroleum leverage against its economic and political rivals from the Hegemonic perspective. So that background of U.S dual economic and political strategy to maintain its leadership in the world is to ensure continuous and uninterrupted supply of cheap petroleum. Various statistics show that the United States by diversifying its crude petroleum needs, imports a small percentage of its crude petroleum from the Persian Gulf region, while Japan, China, India, and to some extent the European Union as before import the major portion of its petroleum from the Persian Gulf region and thus their dependent on Persian Gulf petroleum attach them to the United States. America covers thoroughly the Persian Gulf region directly or indirectly in order to its petroleum and geopolitical pillars work correctly in hegemonic system from the military, logistical and economic viewpoint. It can be predict when the energetic resources will cause establishing a pluralistic system for America competitors and their

growth and thus one of the biggest American hegemonic bases will break down, the United States that catch the Persian Gulf and it huge energy resources by high costs never voluntarily give up

1-3 USD as leverage

Bretton-Woods economic system that was formed after World War II by the United States and the West Block was continued until the petroleum crisis of the 1970s. But in the decade, U.S and its economic allies cancelled this financial system due to petroleum shocks and sudden petroleum cost increasing and founded a new financial and economic system by changing structural and functional system that aims the rapid economic growth in U.S by exploiting other countries capital in the world. Determining the USD as a determinant currency in world market, U.S could supply part of its foreign investment through external financing (loan) and pay its cost and even the original part of loan via coinage of money and creating inflation across the world (Barzegar, Kayhan. (2005). Part of U.S Gross external loan as a consequence of the other countries investment increasing from \$ 250 billion in 1982 to 2 trillion USDs in 2000 that forms 22/ 6percent of U.S. gross domestic product. But the way will continue until the USD may maintain its strict position functionally as a dominant currency in the global economy (Maserrat, the same: 17). In the fields petroleum plays a key role in two aspects:

On the one hand, since the petroleum market is the largest single merchandize market and petroleum global trade is based on the USD, so it is considered as an important factor of USD stability, on the other hand, the most important and largest petroleum exporters, including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait have primarily invested their foreign exchange reserves in the United States. Their foreign exchange investments were 1,000 billion USD by 1990 (Abdolvand, 2003: 181). Saudi Arabia is under pressure to not only continue to sell its petroleum to the United States in USD but not discharge its assets from United States even in situation that Euro area is more attractive for investment. Thus, petroleum and geopolitical factors in the foreign exchange policy become a hegemonic policy factor and simultaneously the petroleum war is converted to the currency war. This is true especially about the Iraq war. Iraq had begun its petroleum extraction for daily 2/4 million barrels by Euro at the end of 2000. The Iranian government is also trying to sell a large part of its petroleum by Euro and for the first time, Euro enters into USD traditional territory (Abdolvand, 2003: 182). As similar as a severe arms race in 1970s and wars of the 1980 s and 1990s in the Persian Gulf War, the Iraq war is that handle the petro-USDs. America as a superpower in the Middle East and

Persian Gulf is hopeful that the weapon sales cycle against -petro dollar which is lucrative for its petroleum economies, not only be established in future, but USD will be enhanced additionally due to huge order American to companies. Thus the Persian Gulf region plays a fundamental role in maintaining and strengthening USD position against other International credit currencies.

2 - The Hegemonic approach of the United States toward the Persian Gulf

Dominating on the Persian Gulf region since the creation of the first oil well in Iran Masjed Soleiman region was considered as a strategic advantage for global powers. Currently, the global power knows the matter and is seeking to gain it. Large project of " Century World Challenge " that had been conducted by the Institute of National Strategic Studies, National Defense University in Washington, it remind the developed countries the fact that their national strategy is incomplete without paying attention to the Middle East and Gulf and large powers will be unsuccessful in not pay attention to Persian Gulf and presence of relations in it. Due to geostrategic and geo-economic significance of the Persian Gulf and its effect on United States Hegemonic purposes, White House the former adviser, Bill James, believes that the main purpose of United States in the Persian Gulf is to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemony that allows threaten American interests and its allies. In this regard, after the Cold War the American strategy in the Persian Gulf was in the form of dual containment strategy in Iraq and Iran, the two countries with potential to change in the regional power balance and as result to threat American and its ally's interests. Thus U.S former government decide to control both the countries, democratic government of Bill Clinton in America, view Iran and Iraq as same as each other based on the dual containment. While the domestic and foreign policies of Iran and Iraq were quite different. Accordingly, In a speech on 13 May 1993, "Martin Indaik" Director of the Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, express the new selected strategy by the Clinton the dual containment strategy focused on enfeebling both countries and its pillars was based on four axes including: 1 - Military pressure 2- Political isolation 3 - Economic sanctions 4 - Spy hidden actions. U.S. policy in this regard was deploying of more troops in the Persian Gulf, diplomatic isolation and abandonment of the two countries from regional security system as well as Middle East peace, economic sanctions, hidden spy actions by CIA, which emphasizes on the abroad opposition. Besides the dual containment policy, United States government followed supportive policy toward the

conservative and moderate Persian Gulf region states (the southern border emirate), which are more consist with its policies.

3 - American approach in the Persian Gulf after September 11

At the macro level, September 11 adventure, as a terrorist act was to legitimize the American Hegemonic actions out of the international rules. George W. Bush and American foreign policy planners sought to stabilize the domination of their power based on hegemonies model due to the nature of American and other countries power in international system So that the United States after September 11 designed its regional policies and objectives in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region with the slogan of "fighting with terrorism" in different way. Unites state sought the wide alternation in the region by attacking to Afghanistan and Iraq and followed their objectives in the shade of democracy promotion and fighting to terrorism. U.S. considered the hegemonic order via full domination over the Persian Gulf region and greatly over Middle East region (the Greater Middle East Plan), the most important American strategic objectives in the area include:

- 1 – Supplying America's petroleum resources in the coming decades
- 2 - Control the Persian Gulf petroleum artery as a lever to control competitors
- 3 - Israel's security
- 4 - Promoting targeted and controlled democracy for challenging radical Islamism.
- 5 - Nation-building process and changing the area map to eliminate the center of next crisis.

This project in a broader framework (the Greater Middle East Initiative) was designed aiming to establish American hegemony in the world and Israel's security in the region, follow other side objectives such as energy security and security energy. So that the objective of this project, unlike claims, is not to democratize the region, but is liberalizing and changing the ethnic and religious notions, speech and behavior according to liberal rules and norms in line with liberal international order. From U.S security strategy points of view and at the heart of it Middle East (Persian Gulf region) are maximally distant and alienate with free trade and freedom and the slow process of liberal forces growth in this critical area with the American army leading role and creating the induction transformation based on "constructive destruction" strategy or fundamentalist destruction, should allow underpin fundamental transformation. In this strategy, forming the foundations of the empire order by promoting American culture, politics, economy and order in the region is considered inevitable intervention that is

essential in favor of the only remaining world's superpower, as the leader of the free world. United States after failing and face to the of social, political and cultural realities of the region, increasing unrest and continuation of instability in Iraq as well as Israel and Hezbollah war, is seeking a new approach for the region. Over 5 years of direct intervention in the region and occupation of Iraq, U.S recognize the fact that the liberal democracy model is not possible by non-native perspective and up-down looking at the area and if any election is held in regional, winner will be the forces that are not adjacent to United States plans and hegemonic policies in the region. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, former White House consular, "If democracy promotion is followed by prejudice that ignores Islam historical and cultural traditions, it can be converted exactly to the anti-democracy". Thus, understanding the current facts, America is following its old approach based on supporting moderate and conservative governments in the region (Persian Gulf southern margin emirate). The governments that have not been accepted by public opinion know themselves perforce to cooperate with United States Hegemonic policy in order to maintain their sovereignty and also reduce the external pressures arising from not observing human rights in their country. United States also by ignoring domestic issues of these countries tries to support them in achieving their objectives in the region. The contract for selling American weapons to Saudi Arabia by the amount of \$ 20 billion includes upgrading and updating the military aircraft and submarine fleet its and selling bombs so-called (Jeden) with high detection capability (including the 500-pound, 2,000 pounds bombs) to an Arab country clarify America's objectives in pursuing its new approach. Besides these, the United States has tried to pressure the Islamic Republic of Iran as the most influential country in the region and also to follow a policy of isolation and multilateral sanctions against the country in order to achieve its objectives as well as by magnifying the risk of widening Iranian and Shiites influence on the region wants to separate Arab countries from Iran and coordinate their policies with its objectives.

4. Discussions

America today is not only flow new hegemonic order in the new and diverse strategic areas based on the more complex and fluid principles, but at the same time is experiencing and building a new model of competitiveness and leadership in the world. The currently forming order is apparently

without the known new geopolitical lines and the rules governing the international system are changing more rapidly. And now different geopolitical approaches are available in explaining the formation of complex process of new structure in world political and scientific circles, but an important and common aspect of all these perspectives is the importance and centrality of the Middle East and Persian Gulf region, especially due to having the geopolitical effective component in all these patterns. The U.S. politicians understand the key role of the Persian Gulf in region to maintain their hegemonic stability so take different approaches with regard to regional and international situation in the region to use this area for maintaining its hegemonic stability in geopolitical order. The adopted approaches and policies by the United States along its geopolitical challenges between the Persian Gulf region countries cause instability in Persian Gulf region for foreseeable future

Acknowledgements:

Authors are grateful to Department of Political Science, Razi University for financial support to carry out this work.

Corresponding Author:

Mohammad Abolfathi

Department of Political Science, Razi University, Iran

E-mail: dr-mabolfathi@yahoo.com

References

1. Barzegar, Kayhan. (2005) "Iran Security Challenges in New Iraq" collection of articles from 15th Persian Gulf international Conference, IPIS.
2. Carlisle, Rodney P. (2003). Bowman, John S.. ed. *Persian Gulf War*. New York: Facts on File 2.
3. Hurewitz, J. C. (1972). The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 401(May, 1972), 106-115.
4. Potter, Gary; Sick (2004). *Iran, Iraq, and the legacies of war*. MacMillan. ISBN 1-4039-6450-5.
5. Ross, D. (1984). The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf. *Political Science Quarterly*, 99(4), 615-636.
6. Sajedi, A. (2009). Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf Security: Iran and the United States. *IPRI (Islamic Policy Research Institute)*, IX(2), 77.
7. Yetiv, S. A. (1997). *The Persian Gulf Crisis*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

8/12/2012