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Iran and Energy Security in the Persian Gulf Region

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Abstract: The Persian Gulf region has been a region of contention and interest not only between the Gulf states, but to outside extra regional powers, owing mainly to its strategic location and its linkage with the Indian Ocean and the Eastern Mediterranean sea, as well as its enormous gas and oil resources which has made the region highly important in global political affairs. Energy is at the heart of the global political economy, and is of importance to global security. These have combined to make the politics of energy within the region highly complicated, and has left the region volatile for quite some time. This paper examines the security of energy within the region, focusing on the struggle for control and influence within the region among the Gulf states and extra regional powers, including the United states, Russia, India, China, the EU states and Turkey who are seen as big players , as a result of which the region has become unstable. The paper argues that no security arrangement would succeed in the region without the cooperation and involvement of Iran.

Keywords: Persian Gulf, Iran. U.S., Energy, Gulf States, Competition, Clash of civilization.

1. Introduction

The security of energy resources is of utmost importance not only to the Persian Gulf countries, but to the global economy and security as a whole. Energy as mentioned is at the heart of the global political economy and is of importance to global security (Hilary Clinton). Many European States, the U.S., as well as the Eastern countries of China, Japan and India rely heavily on Middle Eastern energy resources, to satisfy the energy needs of their respective states. The entire world's productive economy relies on energy to perform, and as such, the global economy itself rests on the availability as well as cheapness of energy to survive. And especially if one considers the amount of oil and gas resources moving out from the Gulf region on daily basis, and the manner in which a slight change in supply drastically affects global oil prices in the international market. Any anticipated scarcity or shortage, results in a hike in prices of crude, which in turn affects the global economy, as it leads to rise in prices of goods and services worldwide, and in turn also affect every household across the globe, as they feel the pinch of the shortage in their daily purchases. During the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980's, the tanker War at the Strait of Hormuz disrupted supplies, as movement of oil tankers was blocked by the two countries. It took the efforts of the United States to restore order at the Strait of Hormuz, which is regarded as an international Choke point, and of high importance to the global economy, as it is connected to the distribution of energy resources worldwide. The tanker War brought about immediate shortage as well as increase in oil prices worldwide. Since then, the security of energy resources came to occupy an important place in the security policies and arrangements in the Persian Gulf region.

However, it is significant from the outset to understand that the security of energy resources in the Persian Gulf region cannot be discussed in isolation from the general security and politics of the entire region (Energy, 2008), especially if we consider some of the reasons that have made the region significant in global affairs, which seem to have economic undertones. Basically, location as well as vast oil and gas resources is the two factors that have made this region attractive to outside powers, that have overtime become involved in the affairs of the region, including its politics and security architecture. Countries such as Britain and the United States have long maintained presence and interest in the oil and gas resources of many of the Gulf States, and have as a result shown deep commitment in ensuring the security of oil and gas resources in the entire region. The U.S in particular has always sought to ensure uninterrupted supply of energy from the region, and it has been able to do this in cooperation with other Gulf States, but with the exclusion of Iran since the fall of the Shah regime. Iran is considered a radical state by the United States since the Khomeini led revolution of 1979. Washington had since then pursued a policy of curtailing the influence of Iran in the region, in cooperation with other Gulf States. The policy is not seen to have succeeded, but was rather seen to have led to a competition for control and influence in the region between the U.S. and Iran. The competition has caused a sharp division in the region, into two main camps, with Saudi Arabia leading the U.S. camp, and Iran leading the other.

The Iranian nuclear program also appeared to have worsened the situation, with the United State and the UN putting economic sanctions on Iran, which has constantly maintained that the program was for peaceful energy development. At a point when the U.S was threatening Iran with new sets of sanctions, Iran threatened to close the

Strait of Hormuz, and to stop oil supplies. It was a situation that led some analysts to examine the possibility or otherwise of such threat from Iran. The location of Iran, and its proximity to the Hormuz, as well as its military capability, makes it a potential threat to energy security in the region. The United States and other Gulf states have disputed the ability of Iran to keep the Strait closed, yet many agree that Iran is capable of implementing its threat. It was argued that even though the U.S may have the capacity to re-open the Strait, it may take some time, and it may have severe consequences to the global economy, as it will disrupt supplies, and would lead to scarcity and hike in prices.

So far it has become clear that the Iran containment policy has not been successful over the years, and yet the U.S. and its Gulf allies have not reached out to Iran or involved Iran in the regional security structure. The question one will ask is; why isn't Iran involved in the regional security arrangement spearheaded by the United States despite its clear strength in the region? This paper argues that the region's security, as well that of its energy resources will remain in an uncertain state, unless the cooperation of Iran is sought on security issues in the region. There is an indication over the years that no security arrangement could be successful in the region without Iran, and Iran will continue to be a threat to energy security in the region, so long as their standoffs with the United States and the West remain.

Many articles from Journals and books were consulted in writing this article, which include the following; U.S and Iran Strategic Competition: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. The Congressional Research Service article titled "Iran's Threat to the Strait of Hormuz". Carnegie papers articles "Iran, the United States and the Gulf: The Elusive Regional Policy", as well as the article of James Leigh and Predag Vukovic titled "Potential Iranian Hegemony in Oil Producing Countries", whose paper took a look at Huntington's clash of civilization theory in relation to the Gulf region among several other sources.

Generally, the paper is divided into 12 sub sections, each explaining the various aspects of the relations and conflict within the region, including the involvement of other outside powers such as Russia, China, India, the EU states and Turkey, who are seen as the biggest consumers of energy resources from the region. These countries are seen as big political players in the region as well, with regards to its general security and that of stable energy supplies in the region. This paper shows clearly the importance of Iran to the security of energy in the region, and by implication, global energy security, considering the importance of the Persian Gulf and the Hormuz as the most important international Choke Point in the global Maritime transportation and freight distribution system.

2. Definition of Energy Security

There are many definitions of supply security, which all imply sudden changes in the availability of energy relative to demand. The definitions are seen to differ in their impact and measurement that is used for the benefits of increased continuity and the level of discontinuity that may be defined as insecure. There are three different categories of authors, with different definitions. The first group defines security as "the continuity of energy commodity supplies", which is seen as central to all other definitions of energy security which is found in many works to mean "that the risk of interruption to energy supply are low" (Christian Winzer, 2011). Technical studies explain this concept of low interruption risks as "reliability", which entails both adequacy of energy requirement and system security which is related to disturbances. The second groups of authors maintain that "energy security is defined in terms of physical availability of supplies to satisfy demand at a given price". This group argue that apart from supply interruptions, security is only impaired if scarcity of energy leads to hike in prices above certain limits, whereas prices below such limits is not to be considered. The third group of authors extended the scope of the impact measure and defined energy security as "the loss of welfare that may occur as a result of a change in the price or availability of energy". This group tended to look at the ability of a country's energy supply system to meet the final contracted energy demand, such as demand for heating, cooking gas, petrol e.t.c. Authors of the Pacific Energy Research Centre defined energy security as "the ability of an economy to guarantee the availability of energy resources supply in a sustainable and timely manner with energy price being at a level that will not adversely affect the performance of the economy" (Christian Winzer, 2011).

3. Geostrategic Location and Importance of the Persian Gulf Region

The Persian Gulf region has an area surface of 29,000 sq miles, and consists of nations varying in some cultural aspects, but with political, strategic and economic similarities and pre-occupations. The Southern part of the Gulf is considered as the sub-region of the wider Arab world, but the region in its totality is seen as a homogenous environment. It includes Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (Helem Chapin Metz, 1993). Geographical location had made the region important even in the olden days, as the major routes of those times had to pass through the region, and it is this that has made and gave the region its significance in the early times. One factor that served in maintaining the character of the region is its importance to outside powers. Even today the super power countries find their control and influence in the region highly important to the policies of their respective countries, the British, Americans (Gregory Gause, 1985), French, Russians, Chinese as well as the Indians of recent have all shown considerable interest in this region.

The region has provided opportunities for these states to create economic groupings necessary for the survival of the Gulf countries in the economically oriented world order. Another factor that has served to give the region a global importance in recent times is its vast and enormous oil and gas resources. It has an estimated oil reserve of

728 Billion barrels, and it possesses 30% of the world's proven gas reserve, second only to Russia with 39.8% of the world's gas deposit. It has been predicted that the region will remain oil holder and producer in the world for the next two decades. The region has a production capacity of 25.4 Million barrels per day, which equals to 33% of the world's total as at 2006. It has almost 2.4 -2.9 Million barrels per day of the world's excess crude oil production capacity as at March, 2007. The International Energy Outlook maintained that oil production in the Gulf is expected to reach about 28.3 Million barrels per day by 2010, 31.1 million barrels by 2012 and 36.8 Million barrels per day by 2020. The Gulf states as indicated above have steadily maintained a major part of the world's excess crude oil production, and may continue to do so in the years to come (Barnes Joe and Jaffe Amy Myers, 2006).

4. Security Challenges in the Persian Gulf Region

The relationship existing between the countries in the Persian Gulf region is determined by certain security challenges. Each state faces the problem of creating its own security program, because it will create a response from the rest of the states (Fred Lawson, 2009). For example Iran is viewed as a threat by other Gulf States as a result of its military capability and investment in security, particularly its controversial nuclear program, and other States also seek to develop similar capability. And at the same time any state that failed to develop its military or security becomes vulnerable to its neighbors within the region. It is sometimes like the devil's alternative, it is a problem to invest in security, and at the same time it is a problem not to. And again all the Gulf countries are faced with the problem of dealing with friends and enemies at the same time. Saudi Arabia and Iran seem to disagree on many issues in the region, and are seen to be in competition for control and influence among the Gulf States, many of whom view Iran with suspicion, but yet have to maintain relations with Iran despite their perceived threat from Iran's military capabilities, and their open alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United States. At the same time the Gulf States are left with the alternative of keeping the Gulf region insulated from global rivalries and disputes, or the choice of creating alliances with external powers.

They have a choice between cooperation among themselves; otherwise vulnerable countries that feel insecure will have to seek the friendship and protection of outside powers. This can be explained mainly from U.S. presence in the region; many of the Gulf States rely on the United States for their security and protection in the region, and have provided military bases for the U.S. in their respective States. The Gulf States appeared to have devoted a lot of resources to deploy a wide range of military armaments. This policy had the implication of creating mutual distrust and suspicion, and raising the possibility of escalating minor disputes into military conflicts. The Gulf States appear to have given outside powers every opportunity to interfere in the affairs of the region. This is seen to raise the possibility that competition among outside actors will be reflected in the diplomacy of the region. These issues have made the foreseeable future of the region appear devoid of orderliness and peace. And at the same time, alternative policies are likely to produce worst results, with disastrous consequences. As a result, the security problem facing the Gulf shows the difficulties they have to live with, not only among themselves, but also with the foreign powers such as the United States which many of the Gulf States rely on for their defense (Fred Lawson, 2009). And any instability in the region will have severe consequences to either energy supplies or price of energy in the global market. During the first Gulf War, the price of oil was seen to have skyrocketed due to the instability in Iraq only, and it is for this reason that energy security in the region is seen to be tied to the security of the region as a whole.

5. U.S.-Iran Strategic Competition in the Gulf Region

The security arrangement in the Gulf region, created an atmosphere of competition among the Gulf States. However, this competition is seen as mainly between the United States and Iran, as the U.S. remains the chief security guarantor of most of the Gulf States. The competition is aimed at control and influence in the region, and has become so complex, and has divided the region sharply into two major camps, with Saudi Arabia leading the U.S. camp, in serious rivalry with Iran. There has been a long history of U.S.-Saudi Arabia cooperation in the region, with the U.S. playing the role of a security ally, arming the Saudis, apart from maintaining a military base in the country. Generally, most of the Gulf States feel threatened by Iran's nuclear program, and it was further compounded by differences of religious ideology. Iran is predominantly Shiite, whereas the majority of the Gulf States with the exception of Iraq are Sunni. This further separated the Saudis from the Iranians. Saudi Arabia is the biggest supplier of energy to China and India in the region, and has always sought to influence oil prices to weaken Iran, who also seeks the attention of the Chinese. The Saudis take a long term view of the market and could moderate prices. Iran on the other hand, is forced due to smaller reserves as well as high population to focus on higher prices (Marissa, 2010).

The United States appears to be supporting a security framework of the wider Arab Gulf States, whereas Iran has a greater capability for asymmetric Warfare than a conventional one. The country had been able to develop a wide mix of land, air and naval capabilities that can threaten other Gulf States and pose a serious challenge to the United States, with severe consequences to the rest of the Middle East and Asia (Marissa, 2010). Defeated at the hands of the U.S forces during the Operation Praying Mantis in 1988, Iran shifted its focus to developing strong asymmetric capacity that focuses on the use of smart munitions, light attack aircrafts, mines, swarm tactics, and missile barrages to counteract U.S. naval power. Iran has also created a conventional armed ballistic missile forces that can strike at U.S. allies and bases within the region with little warning. These could also carry nuclear war heads if Iran can be able to develop one through its nuclear program, though it has maintained that the program is for

peaceful energy. This makes it possible that energy security may be affected if there is any conflict between the U.S., its Gulf allies and Iran (Daniel Brumberg and Jareer Ellass, 2008).

6. Iran and Growing Influence

From the 1980's, Iran became a destabilizing force in the world oil market and was always pushing for higher prices. It appeared to have subverted and radicalized neighboring exporting oil states, both Sunni and Shiites. Among the countries that make up the OPEC, six are in the Gulf, and the six Gulf countries have 81.3 million Shiite population or 61% of the total Gulf population (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010). The Shiites have considerable influence over the Gulf region and their population is concentrated in strategic positions over oil fields and oil installations of the Gulf States. The Shiites are concentrated along oil fields and installations which are off shore along the Gulf and on shore in Qatar, the East of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the South of Iraq and the West of Iran, as well as Abu Dhabi in the UAE (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010). The positioning of the major oil fields in the Shiite area is sometimes called the "golden triangle". It is reported that Iran will use all ability to respond to any significant threats, including oil as a lethal weapon, and has an extensive network of terrorists in place in the region to act on its behalf, and if necessary, to attack infrastructures to pursue its objective. There appears to be a growing influence of Iran in the region as a regional power with strong involvement and influence over politics in several Islamic nations (Borr Reza Hossein, 2009). There has been concern that Iran could ignite active discontent in the Islamic nations outside the Gulf and the Middle East, across North Africa through Hezbollah in Syria, In Iraq, and Palestine with Hamas and in Egypt through the Muslim brotherhood. Iran could induce political change and dissidence through the Shiite populations and Sunni sympathizers which would heavily influence matters in its favor (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010).

7. Geostrategic Position of Iran

The Persian Gulf is at the junction of Asia, Europe and Africa. It is also an arm of the Indian Ocean, linking the Mediterranean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The Persian Gulf has traditionally been the centre of attention for traders, businessmen and big powers. As the Persian Gulf is linked to the Indian Ocean only through the Strait of Hormuz, both the Strait and the Persian Gulf have acquired a special position in geopolitical concepts. Geo strategically, the narrow and shallow Strait of the Hormuz constitutes the world's most important global chokepoint. Oil tankers carrying Gulf exports must pass through the Strait before crossing the Babb al-Man dab and the Suez Canal waterways to the Eastern Mediterranean, or the sea lanes of the Strait of Malacca in the Pacific Ocean. This leaves the Persian Gulf as core region within the global political economy of oil. It maintains 70% of current global excess oil production capacity, leaving the world with no option in case of supply disruptions (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010). Iran finds itself in an advantageous position in the Gulf region; its coast is 1,259km long in the Gulf and has a large number of Islands which can facilitate the protection of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has an edge over other countries in the water ways from naval and technological point of view, based on its military development and capacity (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010). The Strait of Hormuz is a strategic link between the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. The importance of the Strait with regards to the movement and security of energy resources in the Persian Gulf cannot be over emphasized if the strategic location of the Strait is taken into consideration. It is 48-80km wide, but navigation is limited to 3km wide channels, each used exclusively for in bound or out bound traffic. Circulation in and out of the Strait is therefore extremely confined; the sizeable number of tankers makes navigation difficult along the narrow channels. In addition the Islands that ensure the control of the Strait are contested by Iran and UAE. Security within the Strait has often been compromised. Between 1984 and 1987 there was a tanker war between Iran and Iraq, and each party fired on tankers and even neutrals bound for their respective ports, the result was shipping in the Persian Gulf dropped by 25% forcing the intervention of the US to help secure oil shipping lanes (Jean-Paul Rodrique, 2004).



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8. Iran's Threat to Close the Strait of Hormuz

Ever since Iran began its nuclear program, the country constantly faced threats of different kinds from the U.S., the UN and other Western nations. This eventually led to series of economic sanctions on Iran by the United Nations and the U.S. which continued to call for more sanctions on Iran that could force Iran to abandon Uranium enrichment. As a result of these sanctions and further threats on Iranian oil sells by the U.S., Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz (John *et al.*, 2012). The Hormuz occupies an important position in global Maritime transportation, and international freight distribution over the global maritime space. As a result of constraints in spaces, international shipping lanes would have to go through passages and straits, which number up to 200 worldwide. And there are six major Choke points, with the strait Hormuz and Malacca as the most important and strategic globally and constitute the geographical Achilles heels of the global economy. The two account for over 60% of oil transit and the Hormuz in particular is more strategic as a result of its access to the oil fields of the Gulf region (Jean-Paul Rodrique, 2004). Instability has been a source of concern to navigation in maritime transportation, as it compromises access. Threats from terrorism has been of great concern also, as strategic passages can be mined, blocked or interdicted by naval forces, artillery or missile systems (Jean-Paul Rodrique, 2004).

From December 2011 to January 2012, Iranian officials openly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, if sanctions were imposed on Iran's oil exports. The Vice President of Iran first made the threats on 28 December, 2011, and thereafter an Iranian naval Officer restated the threats. The Commandant of Iran's regular army was said to have warned the U.S not to return the USS John Stennis aircraft carrier to the Gulf (Keneth, 2003). However during the "Velayat 90" naval exercises in January 2012, which also witnessed the test firing of Iranian made surface to surface missiles, navy Commander Habibollah Sayyari was quoted softening the threats. In assessing the capabilities of Iran to close the Strait, the Chairman U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey was quoted on 2 January, 2012 as saying "the Iranians have invested in capabilities that could block the Strait for some period", but argued that the U.S has also invested in capabilities that would ensure that if it is closed, the U.S would force it open, there by admitting the capability of the Iranians to close the Strait (Keneth, 2003).

Iran's naval capabilities are divided among the two main branches of its armed forces – the regular Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN, regular Navy), a holdover of the military of the former Shah of Iran, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC Navy). The IRIN controls the larger coastal combatant ships such as six Corvette-class (i.e. light frigate) ships. It also operates Iran's three Kilo-class submarines purchased in the 1990s from Russia (Keneth, 2003). The IRGC navy plays an important role in Iran's internal security and support for pro-Iranian movements in the Middle East. Mean while the IRIN with its larger ships has been assigned to patrol the more open waters of the Gulf of Oman, whereas the lighter fleet of the IRGC is assigned to the waters of the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. Iran's naval forces have developed a clear asymmetric warfare capability intended to use Iran's long coast to frustrate larger adversaries, some of these include; Mines, Iran has about 5,000 mines of different types which could be dropped from aircraft. Iran also has small boats and unconventional tactics such as swarming, which involves the deployment of dozens or hundreds of cruise missiles and other armed small boats launched from different bases. There are also sub-marines; torpedoes that could be launched from Iran's three kilo

class submarines, which could be devastating to warships which Iran stationed at the Strait of Hormuz. Coastal cruise missiles could also be deployed anywhere along the Iranian coast. It is believed that these have the capability to effect the Iranian threat of closing the Hormuz (Keneth, 2003). It is generally argued that while clearing the mines if dropped by Iran could be time consuming and difficult, Iran may at the same time use speed boats, submarines and cruise missiles. While U.S forces may have to deal with other threats before they begin the mines clearing. So, as admitted by Martin Dempsey, the Iranians can block the Strait for a period of time, even though he reaffirmed the United States' ability to re-open the Strait (Pirouz, 1999).

9. The Failure of American Policy in the Gulf Region

The policy of using surrogates such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to protect American interest in the Gulf in the 1970's and 1980's has changed in recent times (Bahgat Gawdat, 2003). This has resulted to a direct military involvement by the United States in the region. This became evident since the beginning of the first Gulf War in 1991, and later, the Iraqi invasion by the U.S. The role of the U.S. changed from that of an off shore balancer into a military hegemon in the region, which many analysts believe is yet to produce any commensurate results. The United States policy of containing Iran in the region did not appear to have succeeded, the U.S has become stuck in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this failure has been attributed to two major reasons (Keneth, 2003). One is that it failed to accommodate the premier indigenous power, Iran. Into a stable security structure and two, American endorsement of Israeli actions towards the Palestinians has created an impression that the U.S. is the surrogate of Israel. And even though this has so far not affected energy supplies in the region, and the U.S. does not seem to change its policy in the region, but it is still confrontational and may likely affect energy supplies, as threatened by Iran over American insistence on harsher sanctions. A clear indication of American failure and the rising power of Iran is how the Iraqi invasion favored Iran, to the extent that the new Iraq is viewed with suspicion by other Gulf States, who fear that Iran may have dominated the country, thereby influencing its decisions. Iran is seen to have played a very careful game of establishing and maintaining ties to Shiite political factions and militia's in Iraq, as well as non Shiite groups in the country (Barzegar Kayhan, 2008).

10. Extra Regional Powers in the Gulf: E.U, Russia, China, India and Turkey

The energy resources of the Gulf region are vital for Asian markets, and likewise the security of the region. The accumulated oil capital is scouting for investment prospects that guarantee higher returns than in the west, which is becoming available in Asia's push for infrastructure. Asia consumes 23 million barrels per day, 30% of the world's demand. More than half of Gulf exports go to Asia, and half of its imports come from Asia, it is the Gulf's preferred market. Among the Asian countries that can be easily identified as having potential and inclination to play a security role in the region are India and China. Both military powers in their own right, and given the current level of economic engagement, they are bound to take part in any arrangement that safeguards their interests, thereby overlapping with the security of the region. Some of the developments and statements of each of these countries suggest that the possibility of an Asian role in the security architecture of the region is more than just rhetoric in the long run. (Janardhan, 2010).

Mean while The Gulf and the EU states maintain bilateral relations, and some have historical ties with each other and see certain European states as strategic actors. Europe and the Gulf continue to intensify cooperation on energy and environment. The EU is diversifying its energy supply and the Gulf States are also diversifying their customer base. The importance of the Gulf region as a political actor, a supplier of energy, an international investor, and a market for Europe is obvious. Securing energy resources is high on the agenda of European states. The EU and the Gulf states see each other as important partners (Bertelesmen Stiftung, n.d). The EU states acknowledge the role of the Gulf States as regional diplomatic actors, and share concerns on security issues on Iran, Iraq, as well as the Arab/ Israeli conflict (Bertelesmen Stiftung, n.d).

The relations between Russia and the Gulf region evolved on the basis of internal and external factors, internally, Turks, Farsi, Tatar and other groups numbering millions have settled in Russia over five centuries and are Muslims, who as a result of conquest became part of Russia and are linked by faith to the Gulf region. Externally, Russia has been a leading European and global power in international politics, and given the geopolitical location of the Persian Gulf region, its vital importance for international trade routes; it is natural that the region would feature centrally in Russian imperial geopolitical planning. Russia and the Gulf states possess oil and gas, and this has brought them closer in order to determine the price of oil and gas in the international market, coordinating the price of energy (Janardhan, 2010).

In the 21st century, Turkey has remained engaged in the Gulf region, but the nature of its role changed. Far from being the combative antagonist of the 90's, today Turkey presents itself as cooperative player intent on pursuing peace and regional integration in the Persian Gulf region. The transformation of Turkey's role has positioned it to be a mediator in the region. Turkey was drawn into mediation regarding the Iranian nuclear question and facilitated 5+1 talks in 2006 (Ahmet Evin *et al.*, 2010).

According to Bernard Lewis, Christendom and Islam are struggling for world dominance and that they are two religiously defined civilizations brought into conflict. Huntington on the other hand argues that there is a greater possibility for intercultural and religious conflict between future world powers, each united from within through culture and religion in a multi polar world. He rejects the idea that the world will succumb to western globalizing

forces to displace the interests of both eastern and Islamic peoples. These non western peoples according to Huntington may aggressively pursue their interests through newly emerging international power blocs. History and current world events would suggest that there is a looming clash of civilizations between European Christendom and the Islamic world. Huntington identified nine civilization nodes, based on the concept of civilization groupings, with a modified iteration of the distribution of future world power. The leading 3 are; Christian European Union, Eurasia, made up of Eastern mysticism civilization around China, Russia and India, and Iran led Pan Arab league of Islamism. And of these 3, two will vie for advantage in the crude oil market as buyers, with the oil rich Iranian league (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010).

11. Future Security of the Persian Gulf Region

The United States was pursuing a policy of engaging Iran in the Gulf region, aiming to normalize relations between it and the rest of the Gulf States (Gary Sick, 2013). However, one of the most important components of any security policy in the Gulf region towards Iran must be the re-integration of Iran into the region and the development of a new security arrangement in the Gulf (Bo Wong, 2008). The Gulf countries may not have any say in certain matters such the Iran nuclear issues, the matter will have to be determined by the United States, Iran, Major European countries, Russia and China. The Gulf countries could not play the role of re-integrating Iran into the International community. Efforts to forge an anti Iranian alliance by the United States will continue to fail. The Gulf countries have invested vast amounts of oil and gas revenue in building up their military capability through weapon purchases and training. This does not mean that they think that, or will in the future be a match for Iran (Marina, 2009).

“Iran has been constantly upgrading its military capabilities lately. In recent years, Iran declared that it had made great achievements in the defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in essential military equipment and systems. The country produces self propelled guns and multiple rocket launchers. In September 2012, Iran’s navy announced the launch of overhauled super-heavy Tareq 901 submarine. Iran is also actively engaged in missile development. Its Shahab-3 long range ballistic rocket has a range of 5,000km-meaning it could reach Israel and all U.S. military bases in the Persian Gulf”. (The Stanley Foundation).

While they still look up to the US, as central to their security, these Gulf countries are also seeking to diversify their outside security. The growing contacts between the Gulf States and Iran must be seen in the context of this diversification policy that vulnerable Gulf States are pursuing to protect their interests. Normalization of relations, between Iran and its neighbors is in the interest of the United States under the present circumstances, and as such the United States should not try to force Gulf states to take sides between it and Iran, irrespective of its strong and significant military presence in the region, which provides the needed security to the Gulf countries against any Iranian threat (Marina, 2009). It is unlikely if U.S. relations with Gulf States could prevent Gulf States from sitting on the same table with Iran. The U.S.-Gulf states relation is seen as entirely separate from Iran-Gulf relations. (Marina, 2009).

12. Conclusion

The Persian Gulf region it appears may remain unstable as a result of the competition between the United States and Iran which has brought sharp division in the region, thereby making the future security of energy resources appear unpredictable (Frank *et al.*, 2010). And it appears also there is growing power and influence of Iran in the region, owing mostly to its Shiite connections, military strength, within and outside the Gulf States, as well as its position and influence over the Strait of Hormuz. As argued and shown in this paper, no security arrangement would succeed in the region with the exclusion of Iran, which is seen by many scholars as the premier indigenous power (Mohammed Ayoob, 2009). This position is quite evident, especially if the failure of U.S. policy in the region is viewed, the now weakness of Iraq, and its relations with Iran as a result of the Shiites connection after the Iraqi invasion since 2003, as well as Iran’s control and military influence over the Hormuz. It is evidently clear that the United State’s policy of containing Iran since the 1979 revolution has totally failed, and the U.S. has not succeeded in stopping the growing political and military influence of Iran in the Gulf region (Thomas, 2009). The energy market in the Gulf also appears to be looking eastwards, and China and India are now the biggest consumers of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf, whereas the U.S. and most of the EU states look to Africa and other oil producing states, and consume only about 10% of energy from the Persian Gulf region as a result of the politics and instability in the region. It is still not clear how the dynamics of the politics of oil in the region took a turn and slipped away from the U.S.-EU state’s control in the past. Empirical evidence sometimes supports Huntington’s prediction of a clash of civilization which is considered controversial, particularly regarding the struggle between two of the three most important of the nine classified civilizations that were to emerge, and compete for influence in the gulf region, with the Iran led Islamic league (James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, 2010). According to James Leigh and Predrag Vukovic, this competition is now seen between the Asian countries of India and China on one hand, and the U.S. and European EU states on the other, and that so far the situation is in favor of the Eastern mystic civilizations of India, China and Russia and the Islamic league led by Iran. And as this research has shown, in the final analysis as admitted by U.S General Dempsey, Iran has the capability to close the Hormuz, and if we go by the definition of “Energy Security”, disruption, its threat, or even threat to price of oil, remain issues of concern. As such the reintegration of Iran in the region has become necessary if global energy resources are to be secured.

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