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## Impacts of U.S. Military Presence in the Arabic Countries of Persian Gulf Security Shield or Reduce of Legitimacy

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### **Abstract**

Persian Gulf region, due to its own Geostrategic position has always historically witnessed the presence of foreign powers as well as huge oil resources in recent decades; the scope of presence, America contributes more than any other powers have had in the region. Gulf War II and the subsequent crisis year 1990, the strengthening regional military status was America. America's actions in the Persian Gulf from 1991 to 2008 had based always on a range special regional interests and objectives that is the most important oil, maintain regional stability, interdiction of proliferation weapons mass destruction and fighting terrorism. Arabic countries of region due to having huge oil resources, they have a special place in the United States policy.

Bilateral defense cooperation agreements, America bases military and security contracts with the regional countries are important reasons. Continued presence of America in the Persian Gulf after the Gulf War II, has had an profound impact on Arabic countries of region. To pay this effects from 1991 to 2008 are a part of the purpose of this article. Findings of this study shows growing hegemonic America after the Gulf crisis, dependence Arabic country on the United States of America and reduce their national acceptance will be followed.

**Keywords:** Militarism, Legitimacy, Oil, Persian Gulf, Iran, U.S.

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### **1. Problem Definition**

The Persian Gulf region is of the rare regions in the world that have been always witness of the foreign powers presence. Amongst all, England and U.S. had the longest and widest presence compare to the other powers in this region. And now it is more than five decades that U.S. made its best efforts in different ways to maintain and develop its presence in the Persian Gulf region, so that this region has been always considered as the vital interests in the U.S. presidents' doctrine.

U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf region has very important effects on the Arabic countries of the region and sometimes makes these countries face with challenges. This article aims to evaluate the impacts of the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region on the Arabic countries after Kuwait occupation by Iraq.

### **2. Research Question and Hypothesis**

The main question of the article is that what kind of affects the military presence of U.S. in the Persian Gulf between 1991 to 2008 had on the Arabic countries of the region or will have. To answer this general question, it is essential to answer the other sub-questions such as: 1- What are the characteristics of the Persian Gulf region? 2- What was the objective of U.S. in the Persian Gulf during the years (1991 to 2008)? And 3- What is the place of Arabic countries of the Persian Gulf in the America's foreign policy? The hypothesis of the authors of articles is that the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf from 1991 to 2008 has led to the intensification of political and economical dependence of Arabic governments of the region to U.S. and decreasing their domestic legitimacy.

### **3. Research Literature**

Regarding the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region and its effects on the region countries many studies have been carried out and many articles presented. In general, related works and articles can be divided in two groups: The first group of books and articles in which study the U.S. Policy in the Arabic countries of the region from historical point of view. Since these books and articles have descriptive writing style and its political analysis present a full detail of the events and refer to the historical texts and documents to analyze the events consequently this method make the authors to avoid the blind judgments and malicious interpretations. But the main disadvantage of this works is that they only focus on analyzing and describing

the U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf and do not make any effort to estimate the results of this policy on the Arabic countries of the region (Sharabi, 1996).

The second group of works pays attention to policies and U.S. military strategies in the Persian Gulf region and their impacts on the Arabic countries of the region. These articles are remarkable in terms of expressing and analyzing the U.S. policy and their objectives and interests in the Persian Gulf, but the impact of regional presence of U.S. in the Persian Gulf region is only considered from the viewpoint of the region countries. (Hajjar, 2003).

#### **4. Research structure**

This paper consists of four parts: Part I discuss about the Geopolitics and strategic characteristics of the Persian Gulf as an important region. Part II is about the U.S. military presence and their objectives and interests between the years 1991 to 2008 and during the various Presidents period. Parts three evaluates the place of Arabic countries of the Persian Gulf region in the U.S. foreign policy, relations and U.S. military bases in these countries and finally the results and impacts of U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf between the years 1991 to 2008 on the Arabic countries of the region will be analyzed.

#### **5. Research Findings and Analysis**

##### **5.1. Characteristics and specifications of the Persian Gulf region**

Geographic and strategic location is one of the important factors which play an important role in the political behavior of governments and their domestic and foreign political decisions. Straits and natural marine buses are of those locations that influence both national power and foreign policies of the countries and also are important in both military and maritime strategies; as a result Geopolitics and Geo-strategic are equal and consistent in these regions (Esfahani, 2005).

Persian Gulf region is one of the regions that had and still has the highest geopolitics and geo-strategic importance from various countries iewpoint.(Poorahmady & Hosseini Karani 2009:105) Geopolitical importance of the Persian Gulf is due to three factors of strategic location, export market of military equipments and goods, and huge oil and gas reserves. We will briefly review these factors:

**Strategic location:** the Persian Gulf connects Europe, Asia and Africa to each other and it used to be considered as the shortest way to access India

for the powers but today its geographical location is even more important considering its surrounding countries. On the other hand respecting the fact that the Persian Gulf connects eight countries of the region to the Indian Ocean, it has been always remarkable as an operational area in the military strategies of the great powers.

**Military goods and equipments Market:** the Persian Gulf countries with over 100 million population and huge oil income are one of the biggest markets for military goods and equipments so that selling consuming and capital goods, selling services either as a consultant or specialist or skilled workers, semi skilled or stock exchange have a very important role in balancing the foreign payments of different countries of the world, especially industrialized countries and also the region is a good market for selling military arms.

**Enormous reserves of oil and gas:** Oil and gas are the most strategic sources of energy in the contemporary world (Moosavi & Nooralah, 2009:86). Persian Gulf region is one of the most important areas of world energy (Nami & Abasi, 2009:53). Persian Gulf has about 650 billion barrels of oil out of total 991 billion barrels of the world reserves. This is about 65 percent of total known world oil reserves. Persian Gulf also has about 31 trillion cubic meters of natural gas or 30 percent of total known world gas reserves. There are over 700 producing oil wells in the Persian Gulf. Therefore due to this volume of oil reserves, the Persian Gulf is called as the world's oil storage (Jafari Valdani, 2003:11-12).

Domestic conditions in the Persian Gulf countries are such that ruins any possibility of bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the countries of the region and make these countries to look after the foreign powers in order to bring security and peace in their own countries. The direct presence of foreign agent is mainly due to the domestic situation of the countries and only reforming the domestic situation can reduce the role of international powers (Ranjbar, 2000:174).

By collapsing the Soviet Union and the bipolar system in 1991 and subsequently the Persian Gulf War and announcing the world new order by U.S., new changes and developments were conducted in this important region. One of the obvious differences of the new system with the past system is that in past political-ideological issues were ruling the world system but in the new system economy has the fundamental role. From this viewpoint in the past system, strategic regions had essential importance, but in the new

system geo-economical regions are more important. Accordingly the Persian Gulf due to its enormous Oil and Gas reserves will be of the great importance in the first decade of the third millennium (Jafari Valdani, 2003:1).

It should be noted that the future security of the Persian Gulf region will be dependent on the relations and the various regional and international developments. After collapsing the bipolar system and especially after the Persian Gulf War, United States of America has been acting as the most important foreign power in the region and is now also affecting the security arrangements of the Persian Gulf and the region countries as well and consequently will be affected by the security situation in the region (Dehghani, 2009).

### **5.2. U.S. objectives and interests in the Persian Gulf (1991-2008)**

United States of America since its independence assumed benefits for themselves in the Middle East and Persian Gulf and established relations with this region since then. (Hajjar, 2003:15). U.S.'s movements and actions in the Persian Gulf were always based on a range of special regional interests and objectives. U.S., especially since after World War II as a superpower, and based on its defined foreign policy and national interests had some interests towards various regions, countries and continents. Especially the Persian Gulf region regarding its privileged and sensitive location from different aspects and its strategic and geopolitical, economical, financial and political status have been always considered as noteworthy regions for U.S. leaders (Asadi, 2004:216).

By ending the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and after a relative calm in the region, Kuwait occupation by Iraqi unsettled the Persian Gulf security again. Iraq war against Kuwait and its subsequent evolutions gave the U.S. an appropriate opportunity to implement his own Middle East planed actions and also have enough reasons for his presence in the region in which some of them are as follows: 1- having interest to have active and direct military presence in the region by signing defense contracts with the Persian Gulf countries and establishing permanent military bases; 2-complete control over oil resources of the region which is about 65% of the total world energy reserves. Regarding the fact that the Persian Gulf region provides 70% of the Japan required fuel and more than 50% of the Europe required fuel this region is very important for Washington. Controlling the Persian Gulf oil resources will cause the dominating oil revenues of the Persian Gulf oil countries and leading the revenue towards demand for the U.S. economy; 3-increasing arms

sales to the region countries creating a threatening atmosphere for the region countries and this will force them to increase their military purchases; 4- preparing mid-term and long-term strategy for American and Israeli forces presence in the Persian Gulf and "remote control" strategy and full support of allied governments.

### **5.2.1 U.S. Goals and Interests in the Persian Gulf during George W. Bush Time**

At the time of George Bush election as the 41st U.S. president, the Hoover research institutions, foreign policy forum, the Council on Foreign Relations, Strategic and International studies center of Washington DC emphasized the following items regarding the U.S. objectives in the Persian Gulf:

- 1- Providing access of the industrialized world to the region oil reserves;
- 2- Preventing the control and political and military domination of any other hostile power with America;
- 3- Maintaining the stability and independence of the Persian Gulf countries;
- 4- Limiting the threats of Islamic fundamentalists;
- 5- Maintaining the friendly relations with the moderate Arab countries;
- 6- Providing Israel's security;
- 7- Preventing Iran influence in the region.

In addition to the aforementioned objectives in Bush foreign policy in the Persian Gulf region, other U.S. objectives after the September 11 incident can be noted. Although after the World War II, fighting against terrorism and proliferation of mass destruction weapons were part of United States foreign policy goals, but the international political developments that occurred in the past two decades has added to the importance of combating against these two phenomena and make them as the central goals in U.S.'s foreign policy in the International compound (Taromi, 2005:87).

### **5.3. The position of Arab countries of the Persian Gulf in U.S. policy**

Arabic countries of the Persian Gulf face political, social, economical and structural problems. This structural backwardness has given opportunities to foreign powers to play the main role in the Persian Gulf. Also these countries due to severe dependence on oil revenues have no desirable economic status and are drastically vulnerable against the oil price variations. In addition to the economic problems, the public and relative poverty in their societies are of the instability factors of these governments

and their severe dependence to foreign governments (Zolfaghari, 2008).

### **5.3-1 Arabic countries of the region and their importance for United States of America**

Amongst the southern Coast countries of the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia is the main base of U.S. in the Persian Gulf and is the most important one for U.S. Saudi Arabia with the high oil production is the main player in controlling the OPEC<sup>1</sup> oil. (Mansouri, 2007:106). There are many various factors affecting the Saudi Arabia and U.S. relations and amongst them oil is the most important one. Oil has such importance in both countries relations so that the word of Saudi in U.S. is synonymous with Oil and U.S. domination on oil resources and controlling the oil and financial markets. In other words, it can be said that U.S. to achieve its ultimate aim as the world's only superpower needs to control and invade the Persian Gulf oil resources and through establishing special relations with Saudi Arabia (Hajjar, 2003:113).

Iraq for several current reasons had the highest priority from strategic aspects. Its strategic and geographical location, huge oil resources and geo-strategic facilities in Iraq, despite the various religious and tribal compositions issues were the factors for powers competition to occupy this country in the last century. U.S. and Iraq relations had different forms during various time steps. Oil is the only natural resources of Iraq which is producing a lot and is under the main focus of the colonists. During World War II, special status of Iraq became notable to U.S. and since then relations developments, arms sales, loans payment and exchanging high rank corps severely increased (Ibid:142).

Kuwait and U.S. bilateral relations are based on vital mutual interests. Washington provides security guarantees for Kuwait and also U.S. is the main source of providing advanced military weapons and military training for Kuwait armed forces. For U.S., Kuwait at the north of Persian Gulf has vital importance for running successfully U.S. policies. These policies include restraining Iran and Iraq. Kuwait stability ensures that its enormous Oil reserves reach to the global markets at reasonable prices. In addition, Kuwait security requirements are considered as a beneficial market for U.S. arms (Ibid:77).

Oman due to its location at the Hormoz strategic strait has a strategic and connecting status between Asia and Europe. Murian, Masyreh Islands and

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1 . The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

also Masndam semi-island adds to this country strategic value. (Kanaani, 2009) Oman is undoubtedly the most important ally of U.S. in the Middle East. Oman's Strategic location along Persian Gulf Strait and also existing U.S. military bases in Oman and in the other side Oman's relations with Israel as the only Arab country in the Persian Gulf with such relations has caused Oman's importance to be doubled for U.S. On the other hand, Oman is one of the most secure countries in the region that has not created any disturbance in U.S. politics so far and has acted according to U.S. policies in the region. In the case of Iraq, Oman was the only Arabic country that was not accused for sending terrorists to Iraq and also did not criticize U.S. policy in that country. For these reason it can be observed that Oman has a very special importance for U.S (Mousavi Khalkhali, 2009).

Bahrain amongst the Persian Gulf Arab countries has the freest political and social environment and also has the closest relations with U.S. and West but Bahrain apart from the oil, due to the U.S. military base in this country has special importance.

### **5.3.2 Developing U.S. comprehensive relations with the Persian Gulf Arabic countries**

After the Persian Gulf War, agreements on bilateral defense cooperation between U.S. and Persian Gulf Arabic countries were signed and during that United States military presence in the region were emphasized and guaranteed. The specifications and features of these defense agreements are different from each other based on the needs and requests of countries but generally it can be said that these agreements provide U.S. access to military bases and facilities of the region countries. U.S. signed defense agreements with Oman in 1990, with Saudi Arabia in 1990, with Bahrain in 1990, with Kuwait 1991, with Qatar in 1992 and with UAE<sup>1</sup> in 1994 (Hajjar, 2003:44).

The United States succeeded to in signing wide and notable security contracts at the end of the second war of Persian Gulf. U.S. allocated its forces in the region and increased their number to 25 thousand. In addition to increasing the U.S. military forces in the region, they have done necessary planning for training, organizing, and quality and quantity improvements of the military forces of Arabic countries in the Persian Gulf by United States counselors (Mottaghi, 1998:197).

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1. The United Arab Emirates

### **5.3-3 U.S. military bases in some Arab countries**

A brief review of the statistics of military facilities in the U.S. bases in Persian Gulf indicates the strategic importance of these regions in U.S. policies. U.S. has at least 20 military bases with equipments including 500 tanks and armored units, three patriot missiles bases, 25 warships, cruisers and warplane carrying ship, 600 warplane and helicopter for various purposes such as spying, identification, fueling and transportation. These military bases are located in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Kuwait (For More Information See: Johnson, 2003; Entezar, 2006; Bookman, 2002; Morello, 2003; Taylor, 2002 and Wolff, 2003).

### **5.4. U.S. military presence in Persian Gulf and its impact on Arabic countries of the region**

The main reason of U.S. interference in various regions of the world is due to its aggressiveness and hegemony in relation to international policy issues and the main players in that region. One of the main characteristics of U.S. intervention is the use of military forces for influencing the regional and international policies after 1990. The Persian Gulf War II provided the situation for U.S. in a way that other military units of other countries were acting under the supervision and command of U.S. forces (Mottaghi, 1998:196).

After the Persian Gulf crisis, Arabic countries of the region have come to the comprehensive conclusion that the presence of a dominant and strong country in the region is necessary in order to prevent regional instability and crisis because their vulnerability will be far greater due to lack of security in the region. Therefore these countries prepared for security cooperation with the United States and also provided weapons and required costs for continuous military presence of U.S. and had full cooperation with U.S (Asadian, 2003:79).

Since Kuwait occupation by Iraq, the military presence of U.S. in the region lead to Arabic countries dependent on U.S. in terms of arms, economic, military, political and strategic and also this caused the legitimacy crisis in these countries in which we will discuss it later on:

Lack of performance in some Arabic countries leaders, the leaders distance from elites and intellectuals, individual, Royal, family or even tribal totalitarian governments have caused this political systems to face legitimacy crisis. This crisis causes internal friability and therefore foreign powers presence in the region is justified (Zolfaghari, 2008:4).

Currently the governments of region countries have no popularity and

acceptability amongst their own people and the leaders are ruling by force and they find the only way of their political life survival in dependence on the West, especially U.S. and therefore they are competing each other to establish better relations with U.S. and instead of relying on their own nations will, they relied and will rely on US support in which this in long-term will cause more fights against U.S. and themselves in the region (Momeni, 2006:143).

United States supports and protects some opinionated regimes which are unpopular among their people. U.S. supports these regimes by a lot of economical and military helps and therefore they will survive. Hazhir Teimourian argues that the anti-west feelings in the Arab world indicate their dissatisfaction from their regimes. He believes that Arabs think that their governments are very corrupt and dictator because U.S. gives these regimes millions of dollars annually and the public opinion is that they are U.S. yes-man (Abdullah Khani, 2008:2).

Amongst the Arabic countries of the region, Kuwait has the most support to U.S. military presence in the region. Kuwait is very satisfied from the defense cooperation agreement with U.S. And since Persian Gulf War is very serious at his defense affairs and United States could sell over 6 billion dollars of military equipments to this country during the past decade. Moreover Kuwait pays a large part of the costs of the U.S. military presence in Kuwait (Hajjar, 2003:74).

UAE is very conservative in his policies towards White House and U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf. Of course it must not be mistaken that there is any problem in their mutual relations because of UAE conservative views. There are many fields for cooperation, especially in commercial aspects because UAE is one of the top 10 markets of American goods. Purchasing contract of 80 jets from Lockheed Martin Company is considered as the greatest arms purchase of this country. One of the other potential factors in UAE and United States relations are the defense cooperation agreement between two countries.

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is the most important country in the Persian Gulf for providing political interests of United States and U.S. has a long security relations with this country. U.S. military Education corps has a very close cooperation with Saudi Arabia's military and they are almost converted into a section of Saudi Arabia defense and aviation ministry. Saudi Arabia to train its military forces uses U.S. troops' educational programs.

Three Arab countries of Oman, Bahrain and Qatar are highly supporting U.S. military presence in their countries, for example based on an agreement

signed between Oman and United States, U.S. navy have the right to stay in the country and use the country facilities and for that 50 million dollar are annually paid to Oman.

Oman benefits from the U.S. military presence in the region and establishing relations with U.S. as a provident action in order to be under U.S. protection and also has financial and technological benefits in his military modernization.

Bahrain and Qatar policies regarding relations with U.S. are more transparent. Bahrain as a country that has almost no oil resources, has tried to become a banking center and Tourism pole in the region. Bahrain has extensive interests regarding U.S. military presence based on defense cooperation agreement however he prefers not to open his connections with the United States.

U.S. military dependent in Duha - the capital of Qatar - says: U.S. and Qatar defense cooperation agreement is the best sample agreement I have ever seen amongst U.S. agreements and relations with other countries. From security aspects Iran is the most important threatening factor for Qatar and that why this country eagerly accepts U.S. military presence and even asks for more U.S. presence and acts. (Hajjar, 2003, 82-88)

Although Persian Gulf countries have different strategies to have ties with the United States, the regional governments believe that U.S. military presence in Persian Gulf is a tight security shield for them.

## **6. Conclusion**

Due to its special Geopolitical, Geo-strategic and Geo-economic situation Persian Gulf region has been always noteworthy for regional and non-regional powers in the history. The region has strategic location because it has oil wealth which in fact has profound impact on both Economics and the World and also the region is a strategic point that connect Asia to Africa and is also one of the biggest military equipments and arms markets.

U.S. has a variety of interests in the Persian Gulf in which they are sometimes similar. U.S. certain interest in the region is oil supply for industrial world economy. Also Protecting Israel's security, preventing emersion of a new regional power and protecting conservative Arab countries in the Persian Gulf are directly or indirectly relates to U.S. interests in the world and the region.

Most of the Arab countries in the region, due to high oil production, are considered as important bases for U.S. Persian Gulf War and the region

conditions afterward provided a very good opportunity for U.S. to develop political, economical, commercial and industrial and most important one military relation with Arab countries of the region. So that many mutual defense cooperation agreements signed between the United States and Arab countries and U.S. could allocate a lot of forces in the region and build many military bases in Arab countries. A brief review of military equipment and facilities in the Persian Gulf region indicate the strategic importance of this region in U.S. aggressive policies.

U.S. military presence after the Persian Gulf crisis was welcomed by the Arabic countries. These countries not only have any challenges against U.S. military presence but also they provide necessary facilities for the deployment and mobility of U.S. military units in the region.

But U.S. long term presence in the Persian Gulf and growth of hegemony of this country will gradually cause Arab countries dependence to United States in terms of arms, economy, military and policy and also will result in reducing the legitimacy of Arabic regimes.

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