Sources of (In)Security in the Persian Gulf

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Abstract

The Persian Gulf suffers from chronic insecurity. This insecurity is the result of two complementary developments. First, the American-engineered security architecture—which is designed to marginalize Iran and is meant to directly and indirectly deepen America's military presence in the region—is itself a major source of insecurity. Second, preoccupation with military dimensions of security overlook equally important elements of human security, which have hitherto been largely ignored by scholars of the Persian Gulf as well as by regional policymakers. Despite increased militarization of the region, in fact because of it, the Persian Gulf is likely to remain insecure so long as threats to human security, such as identity, natural resources, and employment persist.

Keywords

Persian Gulf, military security, critical security studies, Copenhagen School, human security

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Introduction

Despite concerted efforts to establish a durable security arrangement in the Persian Gulf by both regional and extra-regional actors, the areas remains one of the most insecure in the world. Since the end of the Cold War, the Persian Gulf has experienced repeated military conflicts and wars, increasingly militarization, and a concomitant securitization of intra- and interstate relations, including commerce and other forms of ostensibly nonmilitary exchanges. Across the Persian Gulf, oil has configured the national security thinking of local states and directed their survival strategies, and at the same time it has also shaped the strategies of outside powers toward the security of the subregion. Since 1980, the Persian Gulf region has experienced three major wars based on balance of power considerations: the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, Iraq's invasion and expulsion from Kuwait in 1990-91, and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. This is despite the fact that weapons sales to regional states continue to rise at astronomical rates. Today, regional security in the Persian Gulf depends of a tenuous balance of terror that is likely to erupt into open conflict at any given moment.

This articles argues that at the broadest, macro level, there are two primary sources of insecurity in the Persian Gulf. First, the region is insecure because all regional states except Iran rely on an external security provider, namely the United States, one whose very presence and security policies in the Persian Gulf are a major source of insecurity. The very fact that the United States is a security provider is itself a primary cause of regional insecurity in the Persian Gulf.

Second, prevailing conceptions of security provision, which see threats in military terms, miss the importance of much deeper, more pervasive causes of insecurity. Security cannot be conceived solely in terms of defending borders

or national interests against encroachments by adversaries. For some time now, scholars of international relations have been pointing to the importance of human security, and to multiple other nonmilitary factors—such as identity, employment, and environment—that are also central to societal security. These alternative conceptions of security, which are generally labeled as critical security, have not yet been applied in any systematic way to the study of the Persian Gulf. So long as these critical, human security elements are overlooked by practitioners and academic alike, and regional threats and problems are seen mainly thorough military lenses, the Persian Gulf's chronic insecurity is likely to continue.

In support of its thesis, the article begins with tracing the presence and nature of the American military presence in the region, demonstrating how America's security provision to its allies has actually contributed to a deepening of regional insecurity. The military dimensions of security cannot, of course, be overlooked. But by themselves they are insufficient in capturing the range of threats that individuals and societies face. These nonmilitary threats, which go to the heart of the human experience, are discussed in some detail here, largely because their study in relation to the Persian Gulf has been generally neglected in the literature. Finally, the article turns to the examination of human security issues in the Persian Gulf, pointing to the importance of factors such as globalization and regionalism, identity and sectarianism, the environment, and failed states. Only with a fundamental recalibration of outlooks and policies, the article concludes, will the Persian Gulf have meaningful security.

The American Factor

The Persian Gulf has long been subject to foreign military presence. This has resulted in the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces that

have combined to shape the region's modern state system and influenced its domestic political dynamics. The prevalence of US military presence in the Persian Gulf can be traced to the aftermath of Britain's withdrawal from the region. The period of British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf region between 1961 and 1971 presented many of the smaller, emerging states of the Persian Gulf with an existential threat. The ending of the British hegemony was a watershed in the evolution of the security structure of the Persian Gulf. Initially, in the 1970s, the US was reluctant to get involved in the Persian Gulf, preferring instead to rely on its "twin pillars" policy of supporting Iran and Saudi Arabia as conservative bastions of the regional status quo in the region.

As early as 1986, the US military presence in the Persian Gulf was not substantial. The so-called "tanker war" that started in 1987, however, and then Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 substantially increased US direct presence in the region. This occurred especially after the war ended. It was around this time when a number of Western observers started arguing that in relation to the Persian Gulf, "a rapid deployment force capable of large-scale intervention on the ground is very unlikely to be useful in dealing with either the more probable or the more likely threats" the region faces.[1] The end of the Cold War did not change the security conditions of the Persian Gulf. Instead, it reinforced the dominant position of the United States in the region. If anything, the end of the Cold War "actually encouraged the subregion's anarachical tendencies and intensified its dynamism."[2]

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[1] Robert H. Johnson, "The Persian Gulf in U.S. Strategy: A Skeptical View," *International Security,* Vol. 14, No. 1, (Summer 1989), p. 122.

[2] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution.* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 34.

Despite its pervasive presence starting in the 1990s, the limits of American power soon became evident. As one observer commented: "When the Shah's regime collapsed and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, [the US] finally decided that the substitute must be the United States itself. But while it has a role to play in the Gulf, the United States cannot play the role the British played in the colonial era. No nation can play that role anymore because the game in the Gulf has changed. It is much less the politico-military game of the colonial and immediate post-colonial past than it is a politico-economic game."[3]

These limitations notwithstanding, for Washington the Persian Gulf was a key strategic area in which it must necessarily maintain a robust and growing military presence. At least until the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, the American approach to regional security was subsumed under "a grander global vision of spreading liberal democracy and preventing the rise of a strategic competitor" at the regional level, whether that competition may be ideological, technological, or military.[4]

The United States has longed pursued hard, realist policies that have been justified through lofty ideals. American interests, from propping up authoritarian allies to justifying weapons sales, have long been explained away as means of democracy promotion and the spread of liberal, American ideals. During the administration of George W. Bush especially, "imposed democracy as a central plank of US's security strategy in the Gulf" was a major cause of regional instability.[5] The US drive to impose democracy on the Middle East destabilized the region and helped strengthen conservative and radical forces

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[3] Johnson, "The Persian Gulf in U.S. Strategy," p, 160.

[4] Michael Ryan Kraig, "Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf," *Policy Analysis Brief*, The Stanley Foundation, (January 2006), p. 4.

[5] Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 211.

across the Muslim world. Unilateral US attempts at imposing liberal democracy, and a return to old-fashioned balance-of-power approach, is not an option. Instead, what is needed is "a multilateral U.S.-European effort to build a more robust intra-regional balance of power, underpinned by broad political reform around the Gulf."[6]

More crucially, successive presidents in the White House, starting with Jimmy Carter and continuing on to Donald Trump, have justified expansive US military presence in the Persian Gulf, and ever-more lucrative military sales to regional allies, on grounds of countering the "Iranian threat". According to the US Defense Department, "U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies. The United States will do this while standing up for Israel's security and a comprehensive Middle East peace. *To support these objectives, the United States will continue to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in—and support of—partner nations in and around this region.*"[7] The United States has consistently seen the GCC as, in the words of former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, as "an anchor for regional stability."[8] For their part, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and Israel fear that a US deal with Iran would lessen their leverage and geostrategic importance vis-à-vis the United States.

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[6] Andrew Rathmell, Theodore Karasik, and David Gompert. "A New Persian Gulf Security System". *Rand Issue Paper*, 2003, pp. 1-2.

[7] United States of America Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,* (Washington, DC: US Defense Department, 2012), p. 2. Original emphasis.

[8] Quoted in, Robert E. Hunter. "Securing the Persian Gulf: Diplomacy, Not Arms." www.lobelog.com. December 18, 2013.

As an external security guarantor for the Persian Gulf, the US has sought to have peace in the Persian Gulf through either complete "victory" or unchallenged hegemony or the various regional forces, or through fostering a rough balance of power among regional actors, or, more commonly, a combination of both strategies. Regardless of whichever element has been more dominant, the resulting strategy has created not security but rather insecurity. By all accounts, however, current US strategy in the Persian Gulf "has failed to reach all primary goals enunciated by its supporters."[9] As far back as 1979, when Iran was in the throes of revolutionary upheaval, scholars argued that the country could not be ignored or isolated as far as the security of the Persian Gulf was concerned.[10]

The consequences and direction of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq increased the strategic significance of the Middle East's three non-Arab states, namely Iran, Turkey, and Israel.[11] Ironically, the current, US-dominated security system in the Persian Gulf poses threats to the US forces and bases located in the region, as well as to local allies, and even exposes the US territory to threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. US attempts to act as an "external balancer via unsteady regional allies is unworkable."[12] Moreover, the United States is relying on a risky and costly strategy that relies on Saudi Arabia, the weakest of the three local powers, the other two being Iran and Iraq. The United States may enjoy "command of the commons"—sea, space, and air—but not of "contested zones", and should therefore pursue a policy of

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[9] Kraig, "Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf," p. 4.

[10] R. K. Ramazani, "Security in the Persian Gulf." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 4, (Spring 1979), p. 833.

[11] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 216.

[12] Rathmell, Karasik, and Gompert. "A New Persian Gulf Security System". p. 7.

selective engagement. Posen defines contested zones as "areas of conventional combat where weak adversaries have a good chance of doing real damage to U.S. forces."[13] In contested zones, weaker adversaries can do damage to US forces because for them the stakes are higher, they have home‑court advantage, their forces are more numerous, and they have weapons that may be simple but still can kill and inflict damage.

The very premise of the American military presence in the Persian Gulf is flawed. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the United States has perceived of Iran in adversarial terms. Long encouraged by its allies in the GCC, only one president, Barak Obama, and even then at the end of his administration, has seen a place for Iran in the regional security architecture. All other US administrations, including Obama's for nearly six years, have sought to exclude Iran from regional security arrangements through overwhelming American military presence and multi‑dimensional security alliances with Arab allies across the Persian Gulf. Instead, whether crafted as "dual containment" by President Clinton or as "maximum pressure" by Donald Trump, the United States has sought to corner, marginalize, and punish Iran. The simple refusal to acknowledge Iran's security concerns has only deepened regional insecurity. Iran's policies to counter American moves and to preserve and pursue its interests under highly adverse circumstances have only fanned the flames of regional insecurity.

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[13] Barry Posen. "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony". Michael Brown, Owen Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn‑Jones, and Steven Miller, eds. *New Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 5, 20-21.

Alternative Conceptions of Security

American's overwhelming military presence in the region bespeaks of a pervasive assumption that security is derived primarily from diminishing military threats. Stephen Walt, as one of the most renowned representatives of this scholarly tradition, defines security in overwhelmingly military terms: "security studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use and control of military force."[14] For threats to be considered as such, they will "have to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind."[15] Security is about survival, when an issue is presented as posing as existential threat and when extraordinary measures are justified to handle them.

There are, no doubt, a whole host of legitimate military threats across the world, especially in a regional as vital to global shipping as the Persian Gulf and a choke point such as the Strait of Hormuz. Military threats and geopolitical issues will still continue to shape security challenges for the foreseeable future. But, especially in the more affluent countries of the West, the key security threats are likely to be nonmilitary and revolve around issues such as population movements, pandemics, transboundary environmental pressures, and the like.[16] Security should not be defined exclusively in terms of the state or its borders. Security is a human condition, with a security issue

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[14] Stephen Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (1991), p. 212.

[15] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p, 5.

[16] Graeme Cheeseman, "Military Force(s) and In/security," Ken Booth, ed. *Critical Security Studies and World Politics.* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005)," p. 77.

being one that threatens, or appears to threaten, one security.[17] There are several layers or concentric circles which comprise security: security in military and physical terms; in terms of human security; and in its emancipatory sense (as called for by critical security studies).

Security is fundamentally about survival and when an issue is represented as an existential threat. Instead of relying on conventional notions of security, we should be "broadening", "deepening", "extending," and "focusing" conceptions of security.[18] The Copenhagen School of security studies has especially instrumental in "widening" the definition of security threats to include non-military dynamics so long as they pose an "existential threat" to a referent object. Insecurity needs to be seen also in terms of threats posed to and by national identity through phenomena such as nationalism, minority rights, and ethno-religious conflicts. Weak states also continue to be critically important in the provision of security for their citizens or in positing threats to other states. Failed states constitute a threat to human security because of their inability to provide for public health and prevent the spread of disease (with the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the 2020 coronavirus pandemic as a prime examples). They also provide breeding ground for extremist groups. Moreover, failed states give rise to transnational criminal networks, as in human traffickers in Afghanistan and pirates in Somalia. A full understanding of the range of security threats, therefore, needs to go beyond state-centered and state-exclusive approaches to security issues.[19]

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[17] Peter Hough, *Understanding Global Security,* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 10.

[18] Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction,* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 17.

[19] Hough. *Understanding Global Security.* p. 256.

At the broadest level, these threats maybe subsumed under the label of *human security*. Attention to human security means ensuring "the satisfaction of the basic material needs of all humankind."[20] Human security revolves around addressing threats to life. In the human security context, in fact, the notion of security is recast as a social construct. While human security revolves mostly around financial and economic security, it is also influenced by developments or phenomena that are not strictly economic, such as prevalence of crime, the state of healthcare services, poor governance, civil turmoil, and corruption. Famine, for example, is one of the most immediate and acute threats to human security.

There are widely varying interpretations of human security, both in academic discourse and in the policy arena. There are seven areas of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.[21] Human security has traditionally included issues of poverty, underdevelopment, hunger, and other assaults on human integrity and potential.[22] Along similar lines, critical security studies view security politics in terms of transformation of society and the emancipation of individual from those shackles that impede human development. Definitions of human security have often been criticized as imprecise, overly broad, and opaque.[23] In fact, Roland Paris argues that while there is little policy or academic utility in the

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[20] Ibid., p. 92.

[21] Steve Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security," in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, Ken Booth, ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), p. 52.

[22] Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen. *The Evolution of International Security Studies.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 36.

[23] See, Roland Paris. "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" Michael Brown, Owen Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Miller, eds. *New Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 251-254.

concept of human security, it may be useful as a broad *label* to refer to "the safety of societies, groups, and individuals in contrast to the traditional approaches to security studies that focus on protecting states from external threats."[24] There are four features to human security: it is universal; its components are interdependent; it is easier to achieve through earlier intervention than later interventions; and it is people-centered in its focus on "how people live and breathe".[25]

(In)Security in the Persian Gulf

In the Persian Gulf region, internal and external dimensions of security are intertwined. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen was one of the first observers of the region to call for sustained attention to the non-military threats to the security of the Persian Gulf. In the era of globalization, he argues, regional concepts of security need to be reconceptualized. According to Ulrichsen, "each individual problem feeds off the others and acts as a threat multiplier that has assumed inter-regional and international dimensions and constitutes the most urgent security challenge to the stability of the Arabian Peninsula."[26]

In the Persian Gulf, we see the emergence of new challenges to regional security. These include demographic pressures, structural economic deficiencies, weak and failing states, and ecological degradation. These challenges, revolving around threats to human security, arise from and are reinforced by increased global interconnectedness. In specific, there are four factors that have effected the security of the Persian Gulf over the last decade

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[24] Paris. "Human Security". p. 258.

[25] Smith. "The Contested Concept of Security". p. 52.

[26] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 61.

or so. They include globalization and information technology; the internationalization of the Persian Gulf; uneven rates of depletion of hydrocarbon resources; and the continuing weakness of internal consensus within the GCC. Threats to regime security have been magnified by the proliferation of satellite television, the internet, and the widespread availability of social media.

Domestic peace and security in the Persian Gulf is fragile and based on resources. Therefore, the region is not immune to Arab Spring-like rebellion. The region's "transient stability [is] linked to the possession of substantial reserves of hydrocarbons."[27] Resource scarcity can unravel the social contract, prompting wealthier states in the region to invest money in efforts to alleviate the possibility of financial and economic difficulties in the future. Given the entrenched nature of entitlement systems within the social contract, it is extremely difficult for states to dismantle social welfare policies. Nevertheless, current levels of welfare spending across the GCC are not sustainable. The post-oil era will be one of increasing threats to human security in the Persian Gulf and will increase the potential for conflicts. Attention to issues of human security could lessen the potential for these conflicts. In the post-oil future, Persian Gulf states cannot buy off opposition groups and impulses in society.

Partly to address their limitations in size and human resources, and partly as part of their developmental strategies, in addition to coming together under the common umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have embarked on ambitious programs of regional trade and global engagement. Not surprisingly, regional security in the Persian Gulf is "inherently tied to socioeconomic development throughout the world" and

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[27] Ibid., p. 181.

"constitutes a *global public good*."[28] A slow but steady process of "Easternization" has been taking place in the Persian Gulf. Though for the time being still confined largely to the economic level, it has begun to cause certain tensions in terms of Asia-leaning economic direction and Western security partnerships.[29]

Globalization has entered the Persian Gulf subregion at a differential rate. Five drivers for the subregion's globalization can be identified. They include patterns if trade in goods and services; capital flows, especially from the GCC, in the form of investments across the world; labor mobility, especially in terms of the importation of armies of skilled labor from the West; the construction and deepening of infrastructure and knowledge networks; and the diffusion of cultural norms and the resulting combinations of resistance, accommodation, or hybridity. As Ehteshami argues, "GCC nationals are increasingly socialized internationally instead of subregionally," and the Gulf middle class is visibly global in its lifestyle, purchasing preferences, engagement with information technology, and its aspirations.[30]

Faced with sanctions and/or internal conflict, Iran and Iraq have fallen behind, while the Arab states of the Gulf have capitalized on high oil prices (and ever-increasing levels of investments by Western multinational corporations) to engage in infrastructural growth. While Iran and Iraq retain distinctly twentieth century economies, the GCC economies have embraced the globalization trends of the early twenty-first century with a vengeance and are engaging with globalization socio-economically, socio-culturally, and politico-

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[28] Michael Ryan Kraig, "Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf," *Policy Analysis Brief*, The Stanley Foundation, (January 2006), p. 1. Original emphasis.

[29] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 23.

[30] Ibid., p. 69.

diplomatically. The economic and infrastructural growth of the GCC has given rise to, and is being reinforced by, "Khaleeji capitalists".[31] This "geopolitical insecurity has encouraged bipolarity and articulation of security in zero-sum, instead of collective or even cooperative terms."[32]

In addition to increasing globalization and commercial and other exchanges with Asia, and indeed proceeding such efforts, has been the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council as an umbrella organization with the twin, complementary goals of facilitating regional economic integration and providing collective security. From the very beginning of its formation, the GCC suffered from lack of internal cohesion and the suspicion of the smaller Sheikhdoms toward the intentions of Saudi Arabia. Throughout the GCC, there is continued personalization of power and weakness of legal-rational authority.[33] There is also a weakness of collective decision-making framework within the GCC, and GCC states prefer bilateral agreements to multilateral agreements. Moreover, throughout the GCC, uneven distribution of wealth is creating pockets of poverty.

Within the GCC, there are three "major clusters of emerging threats": the impact of demographic and generational change; the political economy of resource distribution and their growing scarcity; and the impact of environmental degradation and climate change.[34] GCC states find themselves enmeshed in rebalancing of global geo-power from west to east, hastened by

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[31] Ibid., p. 68.

[32] Ibid., p. 22.

[33] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf*. p. 94.

[34] Ibid., p. 81.

events such as the 2008 financial meltdown, the 2017 blockade of Qatar, and the 2020 collapse of oil prices.[35]

The Persian Gulf is a "community of unequals" made-up of competing national, institutional, and cultural identities. Nevertheless, efforts at region-building at the GCC level have led to "institutional thickness" and the emergence of a GCC identity.[36] As a regional organization, there are multiple problems with the GCC, not the least of which is its inability to devise a clear identity—is the GCC is a security organization or is it meant to foster economic integration—and also the problem of parity, with Saudi Arabia being much larger in size, population, and economy while all other member states are smaller and therefore not as powerful.[37] But apart from its structural deficiencies, the GCC faces multiple other problems. As mentioned earlier, rapid rates of population grown and the state ability to provide government employment for everyone may cause a breakdown in the social contract. There is also substantive disconnect throughout the GCC between the educational system and the labor market.[38] Local educational standards in the region are generally poor.

Beginning in the 1990s, a series of "national visions" were drafted by all regional states to outline the path to future development and the steps that need to be taken toward achieving a post-oil economy. During the boom years of 2002 to 2008, the GCC states did not undertake economic reforms, making them all the more difficult to implement in the post-oil era. Across the GCC, the younger generation is unable to relate to and comprehend a post-oil era.

[35] Ibid., p. 68.

[36] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 7.

[37] For a full discussion see, Mehran Kamrava, *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 79-88.

[38] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf*. p. 97.

But, as the collapse of oil prices in 2020 demonstrated, the post-oil era appears to have arrived much earlier than local policymakers anticipated.

The collapse of oil prices is likely to hasten the demise, or at least cracks within, the authoritarian bargains on which much of the region's domestic political stability depends. The monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula have not had a uniform strategy for introducing political reforms. Similarly, elections across the region, when and where they have been held, have proven largely meaningless. In what is an apt description of may Middle East and especially Persian Gulf countries, Michael Mousseau maintains that "liberal-democratic values are embedded in economic infrastructures that prevail in market democracies" whereas "collective-authoritarian values are embedded in clientalist economies. As a result of globalization, these values and beliefs are increasingly clashing in the mixed market –clientalist economies of the developing world" and manifesting themselves in the form of resentment toward the United States.[39]

In the absence of institutional means of political expression, a number of threats to domestic security have arisen. A number of domestic and external security threats have converged to threaten the security of Persian Gulf states. Specifically, political extremism, sectarianism and issues of identity, the environment, and failed states tend to pose the biggest threats to the states of the Persian Gulf.

The emergence of Islamist oppositional movements, and their spread through use of information communication technology, has already been well

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[39] Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and its Clash with Terror," Michael Brown, Owen Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Miller, eds, *New Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 424.

documented.[40] In response, regional states initiated a number of cosmetic domestic political reforms in the early 2000s in order to undermine oppositional tendencies within their societies. Along the same lines, international relations in the Persian Gulf in the post-Iraq invasion period has seen an increasing rise in identity politics. This rise in identity politics has much to do with developments within the Iraqi political landscape with saw the rise and increasing hold on power of the country's once-repressed Shia majority, along with assumptions about Iran's assistance to and influence within Iraq's Shias.[41] Although it has little validity in historical fact, the theory of a "Shi'ite crescent" running from Iran through Iraq and eastern Saudi Arabia and Lebanon has gained popularity among the conservative, Sunni sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf.[42] Political elites in the GCC view Syria, Iraq, and Iran through highly sectarian lenses.

In terms of the role of identity, the case of Iran is especially instructive. Not only does Tehran not welcome globalization, it has devised its own "counterglobalization cultural narrative" as a form of resistance to outside influences and their corrosive consequences.[43] Elsewhere in the region, meanwhile globalization's multifaceted penetration of the Persian Gulf has led to social dislocations and has led to intensified polarization across the subregion. All societies inhere contradictions at multiple levels—between the rich and the poor, the highly conservative and those proud to have embraced nontraditional modes, the self-ascribed or actual elites and the rest.

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[40] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf*. pp. 30-31.

[41] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 22.

[42] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf*. p. 40.

[43] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 83.

An interesting development in the Arabian Peninsula in recent decades has been the introduction of Western—mainly American and British—university campuses in an attempt to expedite cultural Westernization. But these foreign universities "remain little more than enclaves" and continue to be physically and intellectually distinct from the national tertiary educational system. In Iran and Iraq, meanwhile, the middle classes remain weak and feeble, and in most part of the GCC they are so economically comfortable that they remain unexcited by the challenges and opportunities afforded them by globalization and efforts to foster knowledge-based economies.[44]

In addition to various sources of societal insecurity, the Persian Gulf faces acute threats from environmental degradation and, in specific, from water scarcity. Domestic water demand is expected to double by 2025, while industrial water usage is estimated to triple in the same period. Over the last decade, GCC water demand has increased by 36 percent.[45] Based on almost purely political considerations, literally all GCC states have made decisions to develop their own domestic agricultural production despite the fact that they could develop imported food supplies far more cheaply. The biggest environmental stress faced by the GCC is freshwater shortage. A staggering 85 percent of the ground water in the GCC states is used for food production.[46] The GCC's ecological footprint is significantly higher than the global average, with the United Arab Emirates having the world's largest per capita ecological footprint.[47] And yet there is no end in sight. To survive and perpetuate their

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[44] Ibid., p. 87.

[45] James A. Russell, "Environmental Security and Regional Stability in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (Winter 2009), p. 91.

[46] Ibid., p. 92.

[47] Ibid., p. 94.

legitimacy, the GCC states must fund expensive and environmentally unfriendly programs and projects meant for the entertainment of their nationals, only deepening the environmental stresses with which they will have to contend in the future.

There is an inherent fragility in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf because of their deep structural dependency on externally generated knowledge, educational processes, purchase and importation of food, financial safe havens, and the like.[48] What we have in the GCC is a rapidly changing external environment in the face of ossified internal structures.[49] But the more immediate threat is caused by the consequences of the failed states of Yemen and Somalia. The disintegration of Yemen into a failed state is likely to cause multiple challenges and human insecurity for many of the GCC states for many decades to come. The flows of instability from Yemen to Somalia are tying together one regional security complex with another.[50]

Conclusion

The existing security arrangement in the Persian Gulf depends on the United States to wage large-scale and dangerous war in the region, and to maintain local military presence, despite local ambivalence to it. The region's security arrangement has been organized on the basis of realpolitik but without the precondition for success, namely the ability to find balance or general acceptance of the status quo.[51] Commonplace assumptions regarding the absence of a comprehensive US military and security strategy in the Persian

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[48] Ehteshami. *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf.* p. 87.

[49] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf.* p. 63.

[50] Ibid., p. 3.

[51] Rathmell, Karasik, and Gompert. "A New Persian Gulf Security System". p. 2.

Gulf are mistaken. There is, in fact, such a strategy, the primary components of which are the following: "a militarily focused counterproliferation approach based upon a flexible mix of deterrence, coercive diplomacy, global military superiority, and the preventive or preemptive use of military force."[52] Although political elites in the Arab states of the Gulf want the US remain as an external balancer, "popular support within the region for continuing this arrangement simply does not exist. This security situation is inherently unstable, and it is unrealistic believe that it can continue indefinitely."[53]

At the broadest level, Persian Gulf security dynamics are shaped by four macro-trends: globalization flows of people, information, and money; the internationalization of the Persian Gulf; continuing dominance of hydrocarbons; and absence of strong centripetal forces within the GCC.[54] A durable, military based, security system in the Persian Gulf needs three elements: balance of power; reforms; and multilateralism.[55] But, by itself, that is not nearly enough. According to the veteran observer Robert Hunter, US engagement in and commitment to the Persian Gulf needs to move in a non-military direction.[56] Policymakers need to pay serious, sustained attention to the societal and human dimensions of security, focusing on ways of alleviating, if not eliminating, concerns over identity and threats arising from resource scarcity and environmental degradation. Scholars and academic, for their part, need to redirect their attention to these and other, emerging, nonmilitary security   threats.

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[52] Kraig, "Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf," p. 3.

[53] Ibid., p. 6.

[54] Ulrichsen. *Insecure Gulf*. p. 63.

[55] Rathmell, Karasik, and Gompert. "A New Persian Gulf Security System". p. 7.

[56] Hunter. "Securing the Persian Gulf: Diplomacy, Not Arms."