

ديناميكيات الأمن في منطقة الخليج: ميزان القوى مقابل ميزان التهديد

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ملخص:

هدف الدراسة: تهدف الدراسة إلى بيان طبيعة التحديات العسكرية وغير العسكرية التي تواجه الأمن في الخليج عبر تحليل منهجي يربط بين النظرية والتطبيق للتوصل لصياغة تسهم في فهم العوامل المتشابكة التي تؤثر على الأمن الإقليمي في منطقة الخليج. تناقش الدراسة جملة من التهديدات متعددة الأوجه، وتشتمل على: طموحات إيران وسعيها الدائم للهيمنة على المنطقة، عدم اليقين حول التبعات الأمنية لعدم الاستقرار في العراق، تداعيات الحرب في اليمن، التطرف ومواجهة الإرهاب، وتأثير أحداث الربيع العربي على الأمن الإقليمي. تبحث الدراسة أيضاً طبيعة التفاعل بين الأحداث الداخلية والخارجية وكيفية تشكيلها للمشهد الأمني في المنطقة. **المنهجية:** تم استخدام النظرية الواقعية كإطار تحليلي، فضلاً عن استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لتوضيح تطور الأحداث وتقييم أثرها على الاستقرار الإقليمي. **النتائج:** توصلت الدراسة إلى أن أمن الخليج ما زال حتى هذا اليوم يعتمد على دور الولايات المتحدة. **الخلاصة:** إن أحداث الربيع العربي التي بدأت في عام 2011 كشفت أن التحديات الداخلية يمكن أن تؤدي دوراً أكبر في مسألة استقرار الخليج من التحديات الخارجية، وأن أمن الخليج سيبقى يتأثر بالتطورات السياسية والأمنية على المستوى الإقليمي.

المصطلحات الأساسية: أمن الخليج، النماذج الأمنية، التهديدات، ميزان القوى، الهيمنة.

The Security Dynamics in the Gulf Region: The Balance of Power Versus the Balance of Threat

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Abstract:

Objective: This paper examines the nature of military and non-military challenges that had consequences for Gulf security via systematic analysis that combines theory and practice to outline a formula for understanding the factors that influence gulf security. The paper tackles multifaceted threats including: Iran's constant hegemony aspirations, uncertainty in Iraq, the war in Yemen, extremism and counterterrorism, and the influential effects of the Arab uprisings. The study looks also at the interaction between internal and external events and how it shapes the security posture. **Methods:** The realpolitik framework will be used along with descriptive analytical method to illustrate the evolving events and its effects on the gulf regional stability. **Results:** The gulf security was and remain to this day depends on the US role. **Conclusion:** The events of the Arab uprisings unveiled that the domestic challenges could play greater role in gulf stability than external challenges and the regional developments will impact gulf security.

Keywords: Gulf Security, Security Paradigms, Threats, Balance of Power, Hegemony.

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Introduction

The gulf emerged as center of gravity in the Middle East by virtue of its natural reserves and geostrategic significance in a volatile sub-region. Multiple regional and international players recognized the gulf prominent significance for international energy market and therefore protecting this area stands as unavoidable reality. Oil has been at the center of Gulf security dynamics and therefore the gulf region has been firmly at the core of regional and international security concerns. Nonetheless, since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 the gulf conventional security dynamics have been questioned. The Iraq debacle coupled with the Obama doctrine “Pivot to Asia” and the American reluctant position towards the Arab Spring, all led to change the security perception among the GCC policy makers with respect to the US supremacy in protecting the GCC states and some scholars even perceived American disengagement from the region. This caused growing doubts about the US willingness to impose a regional security order that could secure the GCC states’ core interests. Concomitantly to such perception, the discovery of shale oil and gas has further reduced the traditional US economic interests in the region. Fundamentally, threat prioritization and security visions across the key players in the gulf are increasingly diverging with even substantial discrepancies. However, the Gulf States continue to rely on the US toward off threats to their security, protecting the state sovereignty, backing internal identity, maintaining political quiescence and regime survival.

Remarkably, the entire Middle East region has been undergoing, since 2011, sociopolitical transformations resulted in heightening security concerns and therefore the Arab Gulf States ruling elites have perceived exogenous threats as major challenge to regime stability. Hence, this paper examines the evolving security dynamics and how internal political and socioeconomic developments in the Gulf States interact with evolving threats in a volatile region to impact eventually the gulf regional security. The author will address the research objectives through three levels of analysis woven together in a strong web of linkage. **First**, on domestic level, there are internal threat perceptions relating to changes in political and socioeconomic dimensions that might cause deleterious consequences for Gulf security. **Second**, on regional level, transnational terrorism along with the potential repercussions of the

Arab uprisings (that broke out in 2011) on gulf regional security will be of particular importance in analyzing gulf security posture. In a related vein, the paper will tackle a myriad of multifaceted threats to the Gulf security on regional level including: (1) Iran's constant hegemony aspirations and its continuing increasing influence in the region along with its nuclear program; (2) political developments and uncertainty in Iraq, (3) The Saudi-led war in Yemen and its repercussions for Gulf regional security; (4) extremism and counterterrorism; and (5) the influential effects of the Arab uprisings as the events inspired significant opposition rallies in Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Third, on international level, the paper demonstrates the importance of the gulf oil for international economy and the US decisive role in providing gulf security. Moreover, it will show how and why the American role continues to shape the gulf security architecture for foreseeable future. In particular, it seems that creating genuine independent and self-reliant security structure is unattainable in the current conditions. The ongoing challenges in the region have curtailed the hopes of inclusive security cooperation.

Research Objectives:

This paper seeks to examine the challenges that have been influencing the Gulf Security order. It looks at the intricate interaction between internal and external episodes and how it shapes the security dynamics in the region. Moreover, this paper addresses the approaches that pursued by the US to maintain gulf security. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to take stock of the ongoing changes and the repercussions of the Arab uprisings and the Saudi-led war in Yemen on the security equation of the concerned states in the gulf. Additionally, the paper clarifies the reasons behind the US predominant and assertive role in securing the gulf in the absence of other feasible alternatives. Importantly, the paper evaluates the waning regional security order and explores how to construct an alternative paradigm to make the gulf more secure.

Research Methodology:

The paper utilizes from interdisciplinary approaches as it employs a mix of methods to detangle and understand the security dilemma in the

gulf sub region. As such, neorealism analytical framework will be used to provide useful interpretation to regional anarchy and security competition in the absence of the supreme authority or overarching government that controlling and dominating states behavior. Besides, a descriptive analytical method will be employed to illustrate the evolving events with the objective of evaluating its effects on the gulf regional stability.

Problem Definition and Argument:

Understanding the security problematic entails deep analysis to the interplay between a variety of internal and external variables that intertwined to affect gulf regional security. The focal problematic issue is relating to the key dynamics which redefine the security fundamentals. It can be argued that the gulf security was and remain to this day depends on the US. By extension, there are calls to contemplate a new approach of cooperative security to provide sustainable stability through shifting away from realist approaches that built on a zero-sum perception of national security. Nonetheless, the proposed framework still experiencing substantial obstacles and it is unexpected to materialize in any time soon. Overall, it can be argued that the role of the US is inevitable for enhancing the gulf regimes stability for the foreseeable future because other frameworks for sustaining the gulf regional security have not yet crystalized.

Research Questions:

This research will try to explore four primary questions; (1) what are the conventional threats that besieged and engulfed the gulf security order? (2) What are the security dynamics that pursued to preserve and enhance gulf security? (3) What is the impact of Arab uprisings on gulf regional security order? (4) To what extent establishing a comprehensive and multidimensional security regime in the Gulf is tenable and what are the arrangements that should be imagined for promoting long-term peace and stability?

The Study Importance:

The study importance stems from exploring the gulf security determinants in broad perspective in terms of how internal and external factors interacted to influence the security structure/dynamics in the gulf region. In particular, it seeks to discuss, theoretically, the evolving

concept of security and threat perceptions in terms of transformations of the regional security agenda prodded by the new security dynamics unleashed and reinforced by the Arab Spring. Yet so far, very few studies have provided thorough analyses for the security implications of these new dynamics on the security of the Gulf region. Hence, the study primary contribution embodied in addressing the impact of conventional threats along with the contemporary events of the Arab uprisings on the dynamics of preserving gulf security based on neorealism theory and via linking domestic and external factors in an attempt to clarify how these factors interplay to influence the security architecture in the gulf region.

Literature Review:

A review of the literature on the Gulf security reveals controversial views on defining security threats and therefore the security question has been up for extensive debate. In his paper titled: "Internal and External Security in the Arab Gulf States", Kristian Ulrichsen (2009b) elaborates on the concept of "Gulf security". He emphasized on a range of evolving threats through drawing the distinction between the "internal" and "external" dimensions of security and their interaction and repercussions on gulf security. He addresses the impact of certain factors on gulf security including the unfolding post-occupation dynamics in Iraq, the ongoing dispute between Iran and the US, and the threat posed by radicalism and transnational terrorism. Besides, he clarifies that Gulf Ruling elites' reliance on oil rents and external security guarantees have proved powerful and instrumental in preventing internal problems. He argues that strengthening internal cohesion and creating more sustainable polities is vital to overcoming the long-term challenges to the gulf security. In his paper titled: "Balancing what? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice in the Gulf" Gause (2003) illustrates threat perception and alliance behavior. He explains how states prioritize among the potential threats they face in making alliance decisions, stating that states balance overwhelmingly against the predominant threat they perceive. This is compatible with the realist argument, and thus reconfirming the central realist hypothesis about alliance behavior. He concludes that leaders in the Middle East view external challenges to their domestic legitimacy and security, based upon transnational ideological platforms of Islam and pan-Arabism, as being more serious than threats based simply upon a preponderance of military capabilities.

In an article titled: "A Comprehensive Security Regime in the Gulf Region: Prospects and Challenges" (2019) Priya Kumar concentrates on establishing a comprehensive and multidimensional security regime in the Gulf. However, he argues that the prospects of developing comprehensive security regime are not visible due to the multiple challenges prevailing from internal and external sources. He concludes that as long as power politics, based on the zero-sum game rather than multi-sum principles, is part of states' thinking and actions, the creation of a comprehensive security regime remains dim and unattainable in the near future.

Parsi & Rydqvist (2011) maintain that oil had preoccupied the American decision maker's thinking due to the West's critical need for oil and therefore the security of the Gulf oil producing countries has been a primary objective of the US military presence in the Gulf region. Rathmell, Karasik & Gompert (2003) emphasize that regardless of how much the United States depends on Gulf oil, it has a real interest in maintaining a stable oil supply that contributes to the prosperity of the United States and the world economy alike. Similarly, Blanchard & Grimmett (2008) point out that despite the fact that the US does not depend largely on Gulf oil; nonetheless its economy will continue to be impacted by oil prices in global markets. As a result, the security of the Gulf region and its energy resources will likely remain U.S. national security priorities for the foreseeable future. Matteo Legrenzi (2011) believes that the GCC states are not in a position to withstand hostile actions from regional powers and therefore the GCC states dependency on indefinite American support is a logical one. Steven Yetiv (2004) emphasizes this reality stating that there is no real substitute for the U.S. regional role. The GCC remains incapable of deterring a major attack on one of its members, because it lacks the manpower and it is not effectively unified.

Ottaway (2009) believes that disagreement amongst GCC states on creating a collective security framework has compounded the need for a continuing American military presence on GCC soil. Clearly, the US attempts to create GCC integrated defense capabilities were impeded by political disputes, differing security strategies, and resentment of Saudi domination. Byman & Wise (2002) point out that the smaller GCC members do not look at the GCC organization as an effective tool to solve the GCC states' bilateral disagreements and conceive of Saudi

Arabia as a bigger GCC state that wants to lead the smaller states and play the role of hegemon in the Gulf region. Anthony Cordesman (2000) emphasizes that the Gulf's uncertainties and complicated problems require the US to stay in the Gulf for decades. So, he describes the calls for a US withdrawal from the Gulf region as unwise. Similarly, Kenneth Katzman (2003) agrees with Anthony Cordesman's argument as he makes mention that the conventional military balance between Iran and Iraq has been altered drastically in Iran's favor because Iraqi military capabilities have been weakened after the American invasion and they have become incapable of balancing or countering Iran. This has been compounded by the emergence of an 'Iran-influenced Iraq' that reinforces GCC states' legitimate concerns about Iran's increasing role in the Gulf's regional security architecture. This exigency prompts Michael Knights (2013) to state that GCC states have no alternatives to US security commitments, and as Iraq would not be able to balance Iran, at least in the near term, the US presence therefore would be necessary in order to check and deter Iranian power. Kenneth Pollack (2003) clarifies that US concern materialized in preventing any rival state from dominating the region's oil resources and 'blackmail the world'. So, the US presence in the Gulf will enable the US to control critical developments in the region.

Evidently, the aforementioned literature shows the conventional importance of the gulf and traditional threats. Besides, it demonstrates the exigencies of securing the gulf region. However, the current study is distinguished from previous studies as it provides systematic analysis to the interplay between internal and external factors to examine how it contributes together to impact gulf security.

Theoretical Framework:

It might be useful to address the dimensions of Gulf security by anchoring them within the theoretical framework of security studies so as to construct a more rigorous and scientific approach to understand gulf security dynamics. This epistemological methodology indicates that the concept of security has become much more multifaceted and complex. In his analysis of regional security and security complexes and how it affects the concept of security as a whole, Barry Buzan (1983) offers interesting concept of "amity and enmity among states" since relationships between

states can represent a spectrum from friendship, alliances or fear. However, the concepts of amity and enmity cannot be attributed solely to the balance of power but rather these relations affected by ideology, territory, and ethnic lines. These concepts perhaps applied to the GCC security relations with Iraq and Iran as an example where the Arab Gulf States security is tied up with its regional complex and such formula led the GCC states to take this into account when planning its national security. In other words, the security of the GCC countries is dramatically dependent on Iran and Iraq politics of security. Barry Buzan (1991) provides in another study holistic approach and identifies five dimensions or sectors of security that do not operate in isolation from each other: political, military, economic, social and environmental. Defining security and threat perception is controversial endeavor and therefore some scholars inclining to prioritize conventional hard security threats when defining threat sources, meanwhile others have conceived threats as determined by aggregate power and thus broadening the interpretation of threat to include subversion, terrorism, and non-state actors such as Islamist and jihadist groups. Others concentrate on soft security threats to incorporate a wide range of economic, societal, environmental and demographic challenges. This point of view argues that the Arab Gulf States security is jeopardized not only by the traditional hard security threats but also by soft security threats including the risk of declining the domestic consensus with respect to the relations between the ruling regime's and the citizens (Bianco, 2018). Moreover, several scholars emphasizing that the Arab uprisings are related chiefly to socioeconomic grievances that constituted the driving force of demonstrations in Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, ideological factors were much discussed in the post-Arab turmoil context as a tool pursued by external power to influence other state politics based upon ideological power. Thus, the events of Arab spring have magnified threats based on ideology and identity. For example, Sunni regimes in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain prioritized balancing against their Shia populations and against all non-state groups perceived connected to Tehran (Bianco, 2018). This threat to the state existence and sovereignty is deepened with the Arab turmoil since 2011 since Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman had witnessed internal protests demanding for political reform.

Theoretically, classical realism emphasized that the primary driver for states action is gaining power and satisfy its national interests in anarchic international system (Ikenberry, 2011; Waltz, 2000). This indicates that the theory reduces the complex concept of security to a mere synonym for power. However, neorealism theory provides another approach to address the drivers of state behaviors other than that of maximizing its military power. Unlike classical realists who believe in human nature as driver for gaining more power, neo-realists conceived the international system structure as the major reason that motivates states to pursue power at each other's expense. In the absence of higher authority above great powers, states seek to maximize its power to protect itself against any potential threat or attack. Hence, the system itself pushed states for power competition and struggle in order to maintain its survival in an anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2010: 78). Hence, the systematic nature of international politics and the anarchy system has reinforced the role of interests and power in determining states behaviors (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 2010). As such, the structure of international system provides the incentives for all powers to get more leverage vis-à-vis rivals. While Classical realists conceive power as an end to prevent other states from markedly shifting the balance of power in its favor, structural realists perceive power as an instrument to achieve the goal of survival (Mearsheimer, 2010: 78).

The Internal Threats:

Countering threats either internally or externally led to the establishment of the GCC organization to maintain the security. As one scholar noted, the reason behind GCC organization was not defense against external enemies threatening the security but cooperation against domestic challenges to the monarchies. (Pasha, 2012: 96) In other words, the rulers in the gulf perceive threats through the lens of regime survival. However, Arab Spring resulted in great uncertainty and instability in the Arab world and in the Gulf as well. Bahrain's stability in particular has been directly challenged by this dynamic. Domestically, the GCC regimes have been involved over the last few years in fighting internal movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran backed organizations or Jihadist movements that could threaten their stability. It's worth noting that the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 contributed further to challenge these societies both from within and from the outside. The Gulf States have

been at the forefront of fighting IS in both Iraq and Syria. Internally, the Arab Gulf States have been experiencing socio-economic vulnerabilities as the rapid growth of the GCC states economies have dramatically increased the number of expatriate workers. This creates important domestic imbalances that risk domestic stability, especially that those foreign workers might bear with them their ideological backgrounds and identity that could be employed to destabilize the hosted state. Furthermore, Youth unemployment and a lack of sociopolitical cohesiveness are among the main political vulnerabilities of the GCC countries. Moreover, the marginalization of ethnic and sectarian minorities in countries with a diverse social fabric such as Saudi Arabia (around 15 percent Shia) and Bahrain (around 60 percent Shia) can make the state more vulnerable to instability (Bianco, 2018).

The Regional Threats:

GCC regimes recognized the linkages between internal and external security and therefore it concentrates on developments relating to both Iraq and Iran and the potential and actual repercussions of regional events on their internal security. So, it's useful to address the impact of Iraq and Iran politics on gulf security dynamics.

Iraq and Iran:

The post-invasion Iraq and its political future in terms of integration or defragmentation will affect regional security structures and threat perceptions. In particular, the sectarian divisions and alignment with Iran remains a powerful filter through which ruling elites in the GCC view the developments in Iraq (Ulrichsen, 2017). Clearly, Iran emerged, in the wake of the Iraq invasion, as the greatest beneficiary of Iraq's diminished military forces; therefore, Iran developed its missile capacities and exploited the time to develop its controversial nuclear program as well as mobilizing the pro-Iran Shiites residing in GCC countries to destabilize the Gulf monarchies' internal security (Legrenzi, 2011: 115; Ghaffar, 2012: 3). Concurrently, the toppling of regimes in both Afghanistan and Iraq has led to expanding Iranian security and military interests, now that Iraq is no longer able to serve as a counterweight to Iran. As a result, the military balance has been disrupted and tilted in Iran's favor, which poses a real threat to the GCC states (Sadeghinia, 2011: 120). Eliminating Iraq impacted upon the regional equilibrium in favor of Iran.

Iran has publicly pursued a policy that manifests the Iranian objectives to play a larger role in the Gulf security architecture and therefore the existence of Shiite residents in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait could turn out to become destabilizing factors for GCC internal security. Consequently US successive administrations had denied any positive role for Iran in Gulf regional security (Ulrichsen, 2009a: 12). As such, Successive U.S. administrations, since the 1979 Iranian revolution, have refused to accept that Iran can play a constructive role in any regional security system. Meanwhile Iran believes that the security measures and arrangements in the region should get through the Iranians not the foreign forces that exist in the region.

The Arab Uprisings:

Obviously, Gulf security has intertwined with the political and economic transformation in the Middle East region particularly in the wake of so-called the "Arab Spring" that broke out in 2011. As such, the GCC states paid real attention to the winds of change in an attempt to sideline the potential impact of the Arab uprisings on their domestic security. So, it gave special attention to the demonstrations in Bahrain and observed what went on in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria because these events had inspired wide popular sections in the Gulf, especially among the youth and reflected clearly on social media (Abdullah, 2012: 6). The Arab spring has unveiled internal factors of weakness in the gulf security system. In other words, the Arab spring has revealed the internal security threats with respect to issues of social justice, the youth's demands, the unbalanced demography, unemployment, democratic transition, and constitutional reform, all these concerns represent potential threats that are as significant as the external threats itself (Abdullah, 2012: 23). Hence, Greater transparency, freedom of expression and political participation is needed in the gulf. Develop stronger, more transparent institutional mechanisms - parliaments, judiciaries and ministries, all these measures are required. The relations between citizens and state in the Gulf should be seen as fundamental to the future security of these countries. Regimes may have the resources to ensure their own survival, but at the cost of broader social and political stability and therefore the Gulf countries should carry out gradual and consensual political and social reforms towards more constitutional forms of monarchy. Transparency and openness in governance should be accorded a higher priority (Kinninmont, 2015: viii).

Additionally, increasing and fast population growth along with inadequate employment opportunities is major threat to long-term stability in the GCC. The Gulf States contain some of the youngest populations in the world which put more pressure on Gulf regimes to generate jobs to accommodate the increasing demands for jobs (Ulrichsen, 2017). Moreover, Iran found an opportunity to increase its leverage and influence and its 2012 intervention in Syria has stoked anger and anxiety in the Gulf States as this incursion foreshadowing the continuation of Iran's regional hegemonic ambitions (Vakil, 2018: 2). So, Iran recent military intervention in Syria and Yemen, let alone Iraq demonstrate that Iran seeks to achieve regional hegemony and such policy conceived threatening and destabilizing in the gulf region. Remarkably, Iran wants a regional security order based on the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region and acted as the custodian of the Gulf security. In this regard, Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council stated that "We have always said we guarantee the security of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz". He emphasized further that "We repeat our stance and call on U.S. forces to finish their presence in the region as they are the main source of crisis and instability" (Reuters, 2019). Similarly, President Rouhani stressed that "Foreign forces could cause problems and insecurity for our nation and region" declaring that "we will present to the world the Hormuz Peace Initiative - the gist of which is love and hope - with the slogan 'The coalition of hope'" (Press TV, 2019). Noticeably, the GCC states reaction to the Arab uprisings took varying shapes including economic incentives, limited political reforms along with forceful actions to repress demands for greater freedom and change that reached to military intervention (Colombo, 2012: 2). Obviously, the Gulf States looked at the "Arab Spring" as a threat to their stability, if not survival, and consequently it pursued a coercive response (Colombo, 2012: 5). In particular, Saudi Arabia policy towards the Arab uprisings has been characterized by counterrevolution factor. It expanded the social welfare to support financially the citizens in the hope to forestall their demands for political reform and in the same time it pursued forceful procedures against public demonstrations (Rieger, 2014: 5).

The War in Yemen:

Actually, the military intervention in Yemen has added to the security anxiety and unrest in the gulf region. Indeed, there are two

parallel wars in Yemen; a civil war between the legitimate government of Yemen against the Houthis, a small Zaidi Shia clan based in the far northwestern corner of Yemen and a regional component to the conflict that involve Saudi Arabia that support the government, and Iran that supports the insurgents. The collapse of the Hadi government in early 2015, and the power grab by a group closely associated with the Government of Iran and hostile to key US goals and objectives, alarmed the Obama Administration as well as its friends and partners in the region. However, the Saudi-led coalition has experienced difficulties in stabilizing the situation in Yemen. The Saudi led Coalition was reluctant to establish a large ground forces presence in Yemen and therefore Hadi government was weak to compete with Houthi forces to control Yemen. Although the resolution of the political crisis rests in the hands of the Yemeni parties through political talks, but regional developments can influence the course of the negotiations (Feierstein, 2017). Specifically, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia was inflamed in Yemen as both states have aspirations followed by severe competition of becoming regional hegemon. Saudi Arabia has suspicions about Iran's role in the regional politics and it looks at Iran as unreliable country that trying to increase its power and political leverage through actively backing regional proxies of Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthi movement. On contrast, Iran has negative view of Saudi Arabia that from Iranian point of view promoting anti-Iran sentiment in the Middle East region. Although the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia was deeply rooted, but it got worse in Yemen resulted in more animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Also, Al-Qaida of Arabian Peninsula becomes posing major threat to the stability of Yemen. Hence, the turmoil in Yemen is turn to become a breeding ground for terrorists that threatening and disrupting both Yemen domestic security and to larger extent the security of the GCC states (Akram, 2018). Yemen has a strategic and vital importance as it located on the Bab Almandub straight at the southern entrance of the red sea, and therefore Yemen has constituted constantly a cornerstone of Saudi foreign policy (Darwich, 2018: 125-142). By the same token, Iran looked at Yemen as a strategic interest to enhance its status in the region vis-à-vis its regional and international rivals. So, Iran plays an active role in Yemen relying on hard power and soft power materialized in establishing partnership with active non-state actors like Hezbollah and the Houthis to change the balance of power to enhance its influence in Yemen and in the gulf region. In particular, Iran attracts some non-state

groups and factions of the same ideology to promote division and instability in order to adjust regional politics and power equilibriums. However, arguably, The Iranian interference in Yemen has been motivated based on Iran's internal security concerns and its attempts to protect its national security interests in a zero-sum equation by pursuing offensive policies to adjust the balance of power. (Al-Qadhi, 2017: 9).

The US Imperative Role in Maintaining Gulf Security

Clearly, the aforementioned analysis reveals that the security structure in the gulf still need desperately an effective American role due to the incompatible views regarding security between the primary players in the region. Apparently, the US continued engagement in the Gulf region represents an extension of the old US security policy that began to be determined as early as the development of the Truman Doctrine of the late 1940s, (Hunter, 2010: 4). Moreover, the United States had used a plethora of approaches to maintain and sustain the gulf regional security. United States policies in the Gulf region have not been urged and motivated by balance of power principles as many scholars believe. On the contrary, the US policy sometimes disordered the prevailing balance of power and does not balance against the powerful actors. Therefore, the US security policy is better understood through a 'balance of threat policy' in which the US acted to balance against the perils of threatening states rather than the strongest and powerful state. As a result, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 is a strong evidence that the war was triggered by 'motivations and approaches that ran largely counter to balance-of-power policy' (Yetiv, 2008: 6). It is evident from the above discussion that creating a durable security framework in the Gulf region depends on three major powers; Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran and therefore the developments in the most influential powers in the Gulf security system (Iraq and Iran) are among the important variables that have far-reaching effects on the Gulf's regional security dynamics. Evidently, the rivalries between these states were increased and reflected ideological and religious concerns which contributed to make the conflicts deeply engrained (Bauer, 2010: 2). However, different perspectives for achieving security in the Gulf region have been considered. Andrew Rathmell makes mention of two options for maintaining Gulf security; the first one suggests deep political reform and the second one focuses on returning to the old fashioned security structure that was built based on the realism of the 1970s era. But neither of the two options

would adequately fulfill the regional security requirements and therefore the Gulf's security should be established based on overlapping and interlocking factors: (a) balance of power, (b) political reform and (c) multilateralism (Rathmell et al, 2003: 5). In contrast, Bowman calls on the United States to develop a new Gulf security architecture that could improve security in the region, thereby reducing the need for a U.S. military presence. The proposed architecture should include the GCC states along with Iraq and Iran instead of forming an alliance against Iran. So, including Iran, according to this point of view, in any security arrangements would be a good step to maintain long-term Gulf regional security (Bowman, 2008: 88). Joseph McMillan emphasizes this when he states that the Gulf region needs to enhance linkages of multilateral relationships on security that encompass all the key players in the region, including Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia (McMillan et al, 2003: 167). However, the downside of these projects is that expanding the security system to include more powers like Iran and Iraq could bring further sophisticated problems, because this would make decision making and consensus difficult, especially when the new member holds different ideologies, interests and visions from those of the GCC states (Pollack, 2012: 5). Recognizing the substantial decline of American oil imports from the gulf as a result of the enhancing of domestic production and diversifying oil suppliers, the GCC countries focused on expanding their economic relations with China and India as incremental markets for gulf oil in what is called the GCC's "look east" policy (Bahgat, 2015). However, some argues that the Arab Gulf States are thinking outside of the box in an attempt to exploring strategic engagement beyond the exclusive arrangement they have had with Washington. In this vein, there is an attempt by Russia to shift from the "Americanization" to the internationalization of Gulf security and therefore in a letter to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly July 23, 2019, the Russian Mission presented what it termed "Russia's Security Concept for the Gulf Area". Russia introduced initiative to, improving stability and security in the gulf region (The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The recent developments in the gulf indicate the deep and engrained security dilemma in the region. Hence, some analysts have been wary that the assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the second most important figure in Iran, in Baghdad based on Trump orders has triggered the most acute escalation in U.S.-Iranian relations since 1979. As a result, the US-Iran standoff and rivalry shifted into escalatory slope

with potential threat to gulf stability (Salem, 2020). This situation led some scholars to state that the fierce confrontation between Trump administration's "maximum pressure" and Tehran's policy of "maximum resistance" will be put to the test more than ever before and it closed the door to any direct talks between Washington and Tehran in 2020 (Vatanka 2020). The traditional wisdom reveals that the US presence remains a key factor in harmonizing the strategic competition over the Gulf. Nonetheless, some analysts believe that Trump's attitudes towards political isolationism and economic nationalism have contested such a deep involvement in securing the Gulf States (Cherkaoui 2020). Consequently, the most intriguing issue is that Trump administration do not prioritized gulf security as he has reversed two historic trends: his withdrawal from any commitment to provide security, unless for a high price, and less dependency on the Gulf oil. In this regard Trump stated, "We are independent, and we do not need Middle East oil". (CNN 2020) As such, the U.S.-Gulf relations seem to be shifting into an unprecedented era of trust deficit and end of Gulf exceptionalism in US Politics and therefore the Gulf States need to formulate new paradigm as an alternative of the waning regional security order (Cherkaoui 2020). Simultaneously, it should be clear that the gulf oil will likely remain essential part of the global oil market and the U.S. will never be able to completely detach from the global oil markets. A third of the world's oil passes daily through the Strait of Hormuz and therefore any disruptions could affect the US economy. In other words, regardless whether the US is a net importer or exporter of oil, its economy will continue to be impacted by price volatility (Loris 2020). Moreover, the shale oil discoveries have turned the US into a large energy producer, nonetheless that does not mean - contrary to Trump's assertion - that the gulf oil no longer matters to the United States. Evidently, if the U.S.-Iran standoff takes escalatory slope towards strikes on energy facilities, then concerns over energy supply and prices will be rekindled (Bordoff 2020).

Conclusion

A basic goal of this paper is examining traditional and non-traditional security issues impacting the Gulf security through employing synthesis of neorealism analytical approach and security dynamics. Indeed, the events of the Arab uprisings that broke out in 2011 unveiled that the domestic challenges could play greater role in gulf stability than external challenges. As such, it might be argued that the major challenge

facing the gulf stability is not Iran attempts to get nuclear weapons or the threat of conventional attack, but rather it is internal socioeconomic and political changes that might be increasingly threatening the domestic security in the gulf. Other challenges materialized in weakening the GCC states internally that could cause fragmentation of the state, Iraqi civil war, and growing radicalism through politicizing Islam in the Arab Gulf states including increased levels of transnational terrorist networks. However, despite the challenges posed by the "Arab Spring" it can be argued that the major trend in gulf politics is more reformist than revolutionary in nature and the forces of stability in the Gulf States are still far stronger than the forces of change. On the regional level, the gulf security will remain impacted by Iraq political and security developments. As such, Iraq uncertainty will continue as an important factor in achieving the gulf regional security. Furthermore, GCC states had been in a relationship of intense hostility with Iran since its revolution in 1979 because of its historic legacy of regional hegemony aspirations. As a result, Iran remains a perceived source of tension and instability to the United States and its Gulf allies and friends alike. However, the deep and entrenched rivalry and competition between the regional powers has prevented some suggested security frameworks for mutual cooperation from being materialized. Evidently, the Saudi-Iranian hostility is more pronounced in Yemen and this has worsened the regional insecurity. Indeed, counter-terrorism is the main concern of the GCC countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular relating to events in Yemen, as the country is a haven to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia apprehends developments in Yemen as an existential threat to its security and therefore, the kingdom along with the US agreed that intervention in Yemen was both necessary and legitimate. Interestingly, the study demonstrates the enormous continuity of US-Gulf security policy during the past six decades that has coincided with US policy makers' consensus over the tremendous and substantial strategic goals that have been consistent throughout that period of time. So, there is a traditional conviction of the importance of the US constant military presence in the Gulf region and as a result the security cooperation paradigm proved difficult to formulate and has become extremely unlikely to occur in the current conditions. Consequently, the US military presence in the Gulf region is deemed instrumental and a staple to maintain gulf security. To sum up, despite

the declining importance of the gulf oil in the American strategy and in spite of president Trump frequent statements stressing American self-sufficient in oil and this from his point of view downgrading the importance of the gulf region, it should be noted that the gulf oil still decisive in international energy market as the US trade partners and allies still heavily dependent on gulf oil that contribute to the prosperity of the industrial world and therefore maintain stability in the region is a priority. Simultaneously, the GCC states desperately need the United States' security assurance and therefore the bedrock of Gulf security will remain dependent on the United States for the foreseeable future. Simultaneously, a comprehensive strategy for enhancing security should be considered in the Gulf through emphasizing on greater multilateral cooperation. However, the GCC reliance on the United States to provide their security has contributed to the survival of the regimes and protect them as much against their own internal societies as against neighboring states.

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