

# Iran and the Persian Gulf Security

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## Abstract

The Arab uprisings, and the one in Bahrain in particular, have caused tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Bahraini government's Saudi-backed crackdown on pro-democracy protests has caused ties between Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to turn somewhat hostile in nature. However, just a few years ago, the situation was very different, with Iran being invited to a GCC summit. This paper intends to give context to the aforementioned development by analyzing its background and dynamics of Iran-GCC relations. To this aim, this paper will examine, review and analyze Iranian foreign policy with regard to the security geopolitics of the Persian Gulf. In the course of history, the countries in the region have undergone political, economic, security and even ideological ups and downs, which have led them to become the focus of major powers' attention. The region has also attracted attention due to its decisive role from geopolitical, security and economic points of view. A look at the background of security arrangements in the region establishes that all designs by outside powers' and all extra-regional interference have been futile in bringing security and stability to the region. Iran is among the Persian Gulf littoral states which, due to their strategic location and possession of huge crude oil and natural gas reserves, enjoy a special status. Any form of insecurity in the region will directly impact Iranian interests. Therefore, the strategy of the Iranian government vis-à-vis the security of this important region is based on the expansion of regional cooperation and intra-regional security-building. In this regard, there has been a remarkable growth in political exchanges and interaction at high levels between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other Persian Gulf states.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, Regional Security, Persian Gulf, President Ahmadinejad's diplomacy, indigenous Security-building.

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### **Introduction**

Being one of the most important geopolitical and strategic regions of the world, the Persian Gulf has continuously been at the center of competition between world powers' during the past centuries. In the past decades, it has been the scene of very destructive wars. The region holds 65 per cent of the proven oil reserves in the world, and is assumed to be the heartland or the center of universe in modern geopolitical theories. Thus, any crisis in the region, whether its roots are internal or external, will be followed by certain consequences for regional and extra-regional powers alike. Therefore, the role and positions of the regional states, and particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran, vis-à-vis the security geopolitics of the Persian Gulf are of utmost significance. In this regard, the foreign policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran are based on fixed principles and fundamentals which, given the situation in the world, adopt necessary tactics to attain considered goals in line with Iran's national interests. With regard to the Persian Gulf and its problems, the roadmap drawn by the Islamic Republic of Iran leads to peace and security in the region and expansion of cooperation with all littoral states. Hence, the Iranian approach to Arab and Muslim states is a special one. The Arab uprisings and the one in Bahrain in particular, have caused tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Bahraini government's Saudi-backed crackdown on pro-democracy protests has caused ties between Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to turn somewhat hostile in nature. However, just a few years ago, the situation was very different, with Iran being invited to a GCC summit.



2007 witnessed considerable growth in political exchanges and interaction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other Persian Gulf states. The invitation of Iran to the meeting of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (Doha Summit) in 2007 indicates the important fact that the six members of the GCC admitted that the extent of Iranian influence in this strategic region is immense, even though the U.S. has been consistently trying to negate it during the past several years at a heavy cost. The Iranian president's proposals at the summit regarding free trade among GCC states and plans for an indigenous security arrangement in the Persian Gulf paved the way for regional convergence in a manner which appealed to the heads of state that were present at the gathering. From the outset of the Iranian government's active diplomacy, it has been able to confine foreign threats outside of the Persian Gulf and prepare the ground for the strengthening of links and relations between littoral states through the adoption of confidence-building and reassuring policies. In line with that trend, the question the present paper seeks to answer is: Which policies have the Iranian government adopted in regards to the security geopolitics of the Persian Gulf and what has it done along this line? The hypothesis of the present research is that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always sought to create conditions in which the security of the Persian Gulf region is assured through indigenous means, free from interference by outsiders. The active diplomacy of the ninth and tenth Iranian governments, encompassing cultural, economic and political interaction with other Persian Gulf states, and particularly the Iranian participation in the Doha summit and its outcomes, prove that from President Ahmadinejad administration's point of view, an active and sustained move towards regional convergence and indigenous security-building could be a strategy for ensuring the security of the region.

### **The Persian Gulf and Its Significance**

Due to its particular geo-economic, geostrategic and geopolitical



situation, the Persian Gulf region has been the focus of regional and extra-regional powers' attention throughout the course of history. The most pressing strategic issues in the region include oil, collective security and arms races (Maleki, 2007: 3). Almost two thirds of the proven oil reserves in the world (65 per cent) and more than one third of the global natural gas reserves (40 per cent) are located in the Persian Gulf region (Camp & Harkaway, 2004: 187-190). Moreover, 20 per cent of the world's oil trade is done through this region (Mir Ghassemof, 2002: 217). The advantages associated with energy in this region are enumerated as: enormity of crude oil and natural gas, exploitation with lower costs in comparison with other regions, and being placed close to efficient and developed transport routes with access to various markets (Camp & Harvey, 2004: 188). Almost 23 million barrels of oil is produced daily by the Persian Gulf states which is nearly 27 per cent of global production. Between just under 15 and 15.5 million barrels of oil are transited through the Strait of Hormuz to world markets on a daily basis, making the body of water an important location for the world economy. The International Energy Agency has estimated that by 2025, the Persian Gulf states will export 36.4 million of crude oil every day; more than double the present volume, which amounts to 17 million barrels a day (Russell, 2006: 13).

The region includes parts of the ancient Silk Road and is also an important shipping point with shipping routes as well as aerial corridors above. At the same time, it is home to millions of people with different cultures and languages (Mir Ghassemof, 2002: 217). For a long time, the Persian Gulf has been attractive and important due to commercial and material interests. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has also been seen as strategic on a long-term basis as it has been considered as a bridge to access other regions of importance. It was from this era that major Western powers looked at the Persian Gulf through the prism of benefit and domination, and therefore gave the security of the region a special meaning and understanding (Sadeghi,



2003: 130).

Home to a five-thousand-year-old civilization, Iran has a surface area of 1,648,196 square kilometers, bordering the Caspian Sea, Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan and Georgia to its north, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east, Turkey and Iraq in the west, and the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in the south. Iran is located in the heart of most of the world's oil and natural gas reserves.

The world's major oil producing nations are located south of Iran, and the Caspian Sea oil fields lie just to the north of the country. Henceforth, from the perspective of goods and energy trade, Iran is the most important country of the region for energy transit as well as regional and international trade development. This has led the territory of Iran to be called the west-east intersection since ancient times (Seddighi, 2007: 408). With these features, the Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the area where Europe, Africa and Asia meet. This means that it is directly affected by events in those continents. Being a military passage for major powers, a commercial route and a pathway to access other regions are among the factors making Iran the focus of others' attention similar to how it was in the past. This focal situation has made Iran an influential element in the formation of its adjacent geopolitical spheres, including the Persian Gulf (Safari, 2004: 21).

Being located between the major oil fields in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea has put Iran in a dominant position when it comes to energy production and transit on the one hand, while on the other hand, it has bestowed Iran with the chance to take advantage of the regions to its north and south to create an atmosphere of cooperation and establishing links with regional states (Andalib & Matuf, 2004: 177-178). The total volume of the world's exploitable crude oil is about 1200.7 billion barrels. Iran has 138.22 billion barrels of accumulated hydrocarbon liquids at its disposal; equal to 11.4 per cent of the world's reserves. With a production of 4.343 million barrels of hydrocarbon liquids per day, Iran has a share of 5.1 per



cent of global crude output (Nozari, 2007:3).

The Islamic Republic of Iran holds nearly 15.5 per cent of the world's proven natural gas reserves and its reserves are expected to last for 166 years at the current production rate. With almost 812,000 billion square feet of natural gas reserves, Iran has the world's second biggest gas deposits after Russia (Mahmoudof, 2002: 405) and in this respect, enjoys an advantageous international position. Natural gas consumption is overtaking the use of oil throughout the world and in the future this trend will continue. From the U.S. point of view, Iran should not be active in the Caspian Sea, and pipelines should not go through its territory. This, as Iranian presence in the energy arena and transit through the Persian Gulf are associated with domination, and the Americans are reluctant to have Iran present in the energy markets of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf (Maleki, 2007: 3).

#### **Iran and Security Arrangements Till 2005**

The aims of the United States' creation of security arrangements in the Persian Gulf from 1971 till the end of the Cold War in 1991 were to combat Communist influence, ensure the security of oil exports from the region, gain economic advantages and keep the conservative regimes ruling the region in place (Gohari Moghaddam, 2004:24). In the same vein, the war in Vietnam pushed the U.S. to adopt the so-called "Twin Pillar Strategy", leaning on two regional powers as its allies, i. e. Iran and Saudi Arabia, to establish a security balance in the Persian Gulf (Ebrahimi, 2002: 15-18). Meanwhile, Iraq was a friend of the Soviet Union whose actions in the horn of Africa, South Yemen and Dhoffar seriously threatened energy security (Kraig, 2004: 31). The "Twin Pillar Strategy" was a vital and durable one for the security geopolitics of the region and was in place till the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. The Shah's role as the regional policeman in particular was completely in line with U.S. interests (Sadeghi, 2003: 128). With the collapse of the Shah's regime, the U.S. faced a new and changing situation in Iran. Iran was not only no longer a U.S. strategic ally, but



it also posed fundamental challenges against American objectives throughout the region. The Islamic Revolution in Iran led to a complete overhaul of Iranian foreign policy, which turned ideological, pro-Palestinian, sought to export the Islamic Revolution and was pillared on the concept of "Neither East nor West". At the same time, there was an upsurge in Islamic movements in the region. All of the aforementioned posed serious threats against American interests in the Middle East. (Ramazani, 2001: 150-170). Meanwhile, as the Soviet Union attacked Afghanistan, U.S. interests were challenged throughout an area from the Persian Gulf to North Africa, called the "Crescent of Crisis" by then U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (Kadivar, 1995: 206). American leaders' response to these challenges, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in particular, was a deviation from the strategy of relinquishing responsibility to regional allies. The U.S. once again started assuming a direct responsibility strategy. It was due to these developments that the U.S. took action to create rapid reaction forces while signing joint defense pacts with regional states (Naimi Arfa, 1991: 45).

In accordance with realism's "balance of power" doctrine, Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980. Meanwhile, despite U.S. claims of no direct American interference, the war broke out in line with the Rambo Doctrine, a strategy adopted by then U.S. President-elect Ronald Reagan. It was directed against the Third World revolutions and based on the imposing of no-win wars on them with a view to drag such revolutions to a dead end (MarefatJu, 2000: 58). The American position vis-à-vis the Iran-Iraq war fluctuated from claiming to be neutral to blatant intervention based on Iraq's position (Massoud Nia, 1999: 193-187). One could say that Iran did not play any role in the regional security arrangements during this period. Moreover, those arrangements were aimed at neutralizing and confronting what was deemed Iranian threats. In 1981, in the beginning of the war Iraq imposed on Iran, the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, comprised of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the



United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman was formed with the main objective of creating a security belt and preparedness to confront potential threats seen as possibly being posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (Maleki, 2003: 37). In the 1990s, the U.S. tried to establish some sort of a balance of power between Iran and Iraq through the adoption of a "Dual Containment Policy" in order to prevent the unlimited growth of the military capabilities of the two countries (Kraig, 2004: 31). Under this policy, the U.S. increased the number of its military bases in the region while persuading GCC member states to create a joint military force, similar to NATO, in order to be able to rapidly defend themselves against supposed threats posed by Iran and Iraq. At its conference in Damascus in 1991, the GCC issued a statement about the creation of a joint Arab force in the region. However, as time passed, the idea never turned into reality. (Haji Yusefi, 2004: 15-18). After the war with Iran, Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait. The move antagonized the U.S., which led an international operation to liberate Kuwait. After the liberation of Kuwait, severe international sanctions were imposed against Iraq, while the U.S. massively increased its military presence in the Persian Gulf region (Vaezi, 2008: 3).

Following the September 11 attacks, the U.S. came to the conclusion that it needs an increased presence in the Middle East and must avoid trusting the GCC members too much. This was especially evident when it came to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose nationals were directly involved in the terrorist attacks. In the same vein, the U.S. adopted a strategy of attaining absolute security through pre-emptive wars and a global struggle against terrorism and the factors behind it. There was also a focus on states opposed to American global hegemony, with such countries put on a blacklist and in some cases becoming the target of regime change (Sahar Khiz, 2002: 397).

The U.S. strategy in the Persian Gulf was based on concepts such as effective destruction capabilities (occupation of Iraq),





capacity-building to destruct hard targets (dispatching naval fleets to the Persian Gulf), and also combating the vulnerability posed by certain countries' second-strike capabilities (in case of enemies resorting to non-conventional means and arms) (Farahani, 2006: 2). During the 1990s, the Iranian approach to the Persian Gulf was to improve ties with states on the southern side of the body of water, support international decisions in the war against Iraq, and more importantly step up efforts to end its isolation. The aforementioned was all indicate of Iranian leaders' will to participate in regional security arrangements based on a doctrine of self-reliance (Amir Ahmadi, 2005(a): 6). However, once again, American leaders refused to accept Iranian participation, despite positive reactions from the side of some regional states including Kuwait, Oman and even Saudi Arabia. The main reason for the U.S. rejection seemed to be Iran's opposition to American objectives within the framework of a new order in the region, particularly when it came to the peace process between Arabs and Israel. In addition, Iran was opposed to some other U.S. policies in the region, including the perpetuation of its military presence and making use of oil as a political weapon. American leaders' perception of a new order was the establishment of their monopolistic domination over those parts of the world where the U.S. used to race against the Soviet Union for control (Amir Ahmadi, 2005(b): 46). It was seemingly clear that the U.S. would not tolerate challenges against its policies in the Middle East posed by Iran and would not only prevent Iranian participation in regional security arrangements but also seek to confront Iran through the formulation of the "Dual Containment" strategy. American security strategy in the Persian Gulf during the Clinton administration involved confronting Iran and Iraq as opponents of U.S. policies in the region. The ousting of Saddam Hussein was chosen as the American approach towards Iraq (Lik, 1993: 8.) However, in regards to Iran, given the democratic pillars of its Islamic system of governance and implementation of reconstruction plans, Americans



went for a propaganda war and engaging Iran in crises at the regional level such as the dispute with the United Arab Emirates about the three islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and the Lesser Tunb. At the global level, the U.S. opted to fabricate allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran, including accusations of human rights violations and that Iran attempted to access weapons of mass destruction. The aforementioned was all in line with the "Dual Containment" strategy (Massoud Nia, 1994: 15). Simultaneously, the U.S. adopted economic sanctions against Iran. The D'Amato Act outlawed public and private investment worth more than \$20 million in Iranian oil fields.

At the time being, the U.S. and other major powers are seeking to maintain their domination through a sustainable security process and control over oil interests. White House officials are attempting to meet their needs through control and domination over oil resources in the Persian Gulf region in order to secure their economic reign. However, the American presence in the region is conditioned on two factors: a) creating division and an arms race between regional states through infiltration of countries that lack democratic bases to weaken powerful regional states. b) to weaken the Islamic Republic of Iran through exaggerating the nuclear issue, fabricating an illusion that expanding ties with Iran is dangerous for regional states, and also widespread propagation of a supposed danger to security posed by Iran on the global level.

American attempts to create division and an arms race in the region could be furthered through the establishment of "regional defense pacts" or the concluding of "security agreements" with Middle Eastern states. The latter were pursued by the administration of George W Bush for the purpose of maintaining control over the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. The then U.S. Secretary of State's tour of the region, accompanied by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, could be considered as an effort to prepare the ground for the implementation of a new U.S. strategy in the Persian Gulf and the



Middle East. Meanwhile, the U.S. plans' to sell advanced arms to Persian Gulf states and Egypt were implemented under circumstances where the security risks American troops in the region are facing had increased and various groups had started to criticize Bush's defense and security policies. Meanwhile, many strategists believe that hegemony is not secured through increased military intervention, but involves indirect control and management of regional security. They argue that equipping some states with modern weaponry while depriving others of such arms will lead to a more effective outcome for the strategic goals of the United States. Separately, another group of strategists consider American problems in the region as so deep that they won't be solved with the sale of modern weaponry to some states and indirect control through regional allies (Haji Babayi, 2008: 3).

#### **President Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy**

The current Iranian government's foreign policies are based on eight active and effective diplomatic approaches as well as a belief in the establishment and continuation of international ties on the basis of dignity, wisdom and goodwill. The diplomatic approaches are the following:

1. Adoption of a tension-reducing strategy in bilateral relations and threat-removing policies in international relations.
2. Strategically looking at political, cultural, and economic developments in the international arena and wisely using international and regional opportunities in line with national interests.
3. Cooperation with Islamic states with a view to create a pole consisting of Muslim countries in the future multi-polar world system.
4. Prioritizing a regional approach in international relations and prioritizing cultural, economic and political ties with the Islamic world, Persian Gulf states, Caspian Sea and Central Asian countries, Pacific nations and Europe.
5. Comprehensive struggle against state and non-state sponsored



terrorism.

6. Making efforts to expose and confront modern colonialism, combating the global hegemonic powers' ploys and supporting the oppressed people of Palestine.

7. Expanding cooperation with independent and non-aligned states based on national interests and the good of Iran's Islamic system, and establishing just relations.

8. Continuing the struggle against the unipolar world system and the global hegemonic empire (IRNA, 2007: 8-6).

Until the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian security approach in the region was based on an alliance and convergence with the West and especially the United States. Iran and Saudi Arabia were considered as two pillars of security in the region by the U.S. during the Cold War. (Ebrahimi, 2002: 18). After the Islamic Revolution, Iran moved towards adopting an independent security policy and acted to define itself outside the strategies and approaches adopted by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. In the same vein, cooperation and collaboration with regional actors to form regional security arrangements were given priority. The Iranian government's approach towards its peripheral surroundings is based on cooperation and participation as far as a security model is concerned. In this approach, the serious participation of all regional states in organizing a regional security structure and effective cooperation in this regard is a priority. On the other hand, the continued presence of outside powers in regional security arrangements is rejected and this presence is considered as a main factor behind the heightening of tensions and conflicts in the region. Iran was particularly opposed to the hegemonic security model after the September 11 attacks, which saw an increased American military presence in the region and U.S. attempts to create multi-dimensional military bonds with its allies. Ultimately, given its inability to deliver what it sought, and a resulting spread of disputes and radicalism in the region during recent years, the hegemonic security model lost its credibility as a permanent and



successful approach (Vaezi, 2007: 4).

The Iranian security approach, given the developments of recent years and experiences gained in the region, includes parameters and elements which could lead to the formation of a sustainable security system if implemented. The first parameter of this approach is the reduction of regional powers military presence which could intensify radicalism and terrorism, leading to the undermining of cooperation and natural relations among the states of the region. The second parameter of cooperation and partnership within a regional security structure is consultation and cooperation between larger states such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the settlement of joint challenges such as terrorism and management of interaction models between ethnic-religious sub-national groups and central states. In the same vein, combating radicalism and terrorism should be accompanied with complementary policies which are able to preserve central states' control and management power on the one hand, and prevent radicalization of ethnic-religious inclinations by creating mechanisms for sub-national groups' participation and action, on the other. Given the extent of the security disputes and challenges in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, the impact of various factors at sub-national, national, regional and supra-regional levels in regional insecurity and instability, security-building within the framework of a security system which is based on cooperation and partnership requires gradual and long-term efforts. In this process, regional cooperation is dependent on step-by-step confidence-building measures between states while taking action to settle those challenges which are the outcome of structural conflicts like problems attached to the process of nation-state building and the weakness of democratic processes and culture. Iranian President Ahmadinejad's administration is seeking the settlement of security challenges through the cooperation of regional actors and their participation based on the abovementioned approach. Although the type and nature of security challenges in diverse fields differ, there are common features and elements in the challenges of



each field which, given the parameters of the cooperation and partnership-based security approach, is subject to gradual settlement (Vaezi, 2007: 5).

In a speech delivered at a seminar sponsored by the Dubai-based Gulf Research Center in January 2007, Dr. Mousavian offered some proposals for the maintenance of security in the Persian Gulf, while enumerating the consequences of the American military presence in the region. His proposals were:

A) Regional states should establish a comprehensive regional security system and a collective security system as the best security guarantee for themselves. The foundation of this system is cooperation and emphasizes common parameters as well as the abatement of conflicting ones.

B) Reduction of external powers' military presence in the region and changing their function from militarization of the region to contributing to the strengthening of a comprehensive regional cooperation system, and assisting creation and strengthening of infrastructure that could obviate underdevelopment, which is one of the most fundamental causes of insecurity.

C) A mechanism should be devised for combating terrorism and its roots through regional cooperation and a collective security system.

D) Stability in Iraq is more important than anything else for regional stability as a whole (at the time, in 2007). Regional states' security is not separate from that of Iraq. Thus, regional dialog and cooperation mechanisms should be activated and the grounds for the eviction of outsiders from Iraq as well as ways of ensuring stability in the country should be considered.

E) Freeing the Persian Gulf region and the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction is a basic step. However, it should be borne in mind that with the military presence of major powers in the region, one could not think of a practical plan in this respect. The major powers present in the region are the holders of the main



stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in the world. One of the most important outcomes of freeing the Persian Gulf region and the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction should be the elimination of foreign states' military presence. Otherwise, external powers will permanently dominate the Middle East.

F) The conditions for the materialization of the abovementioned points include mutual trust and confidence as well as transparency among the regional states.

G) A “collective system of regional cooperation” as the most principal factor in ensuring the security of regional states is dependent on comprehensive confidence-building measures. The existence of a collective regional system for cooperation in the political, security, economic, cultural, social and military spheres is a “vital necessity” for comprehensive confidence-building, non-interference of external powers, sustainable peace and stability as well as security, strengthening of ties among nations and sustainable development in the region. Finally, attaining a unitary identity in security issues could be placed on the agenda of regional states (Mousavian, 2007: 8).

### **Doha Summit: A Turning Point in the Political History of the Persian Gulf**

The Annapolis Summit was the result of months of strenuous diplomatic efforts and several visits by the U.S. Secretary of State to the Persian Gulf region. The agenda of the summit was supposedly topped by the issue of reconciliation between Israel and the Arabs. However, as many experts believe, its real clandestine objective was to incite isolation of Iran and create a row between Iran and Arab countries (Kayhan Daily, 2007: 3). Under such circumstances, the GCC announced that it had invited Iran's president to its summit in Doha in 2007. It was the first time since the regional bloc's establishment in the 1980s that an Iranian president had been invited. Even though the foundation of the GCC was rooted in some sort of hostility against Iran, now after more than quarter a century, despite



all ups and downs in the ties between Iran and other Persian Gulf states, the GCC's invitation of Iran's president should be considered as a fundamental change in the strategies of its members. In this framework, one could say that the summit, convened on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of December in Doha, the capital city of Qatar, was a very important achievement for the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Mehr News Agency, 2007:1).

The invitation, apart from being a clear reflection of the U.S. defeat in all of its attempts to isolate the Islamic Republic in the region and mobilizing all other Persian Gulf states against Iran, also bore other important political messages. The GCC's invitation to President Ahmadinejad was extended after the summit of the Caspian Sea states in Tehran, which was marked by the Russian president's presence for the first time. The latter was another "first time" recorded in the history of Iranian foreign policy, clearly indicating the active and successful diplomacy of the Ahmadinejad administration. The most important political message sent by inviting President Ahmadinejad to attend the Doha Summit was the formal recognition of Iran as an influential and significant regional power. Persian Gulf states and many other countries now recognize Iran as an influential and responsible power, despite all of the propaganda spread by the US and its European allies. The role of Iran today is an undeniable reality, and the rejection and ignoring of its standing through pressure and propaganda is not possible. Pragmatism abides the Persian Gulf states to interact with Iran instead of giving in to U.S. pressure to group themselves against the Islamic Republic. This is true for the U.S. itself, since it has recognized Iran's power despite denying the fact in public. However, another message was delivered through the invitation of the Iranian president to the GCC's summit in 2007; that the Iranian government's confidence-building efforts in the region had proven to be effective. President Ahmadinejad's diplomacy emphasizes the Islamic Republic of Iran's power in the face of domineering powers as well as amity and fraternity with the Muslim





states of the region (Iran daily, 2008:5).

At the end of the summit, President Ahmadinejad announced that the declared policy of Iran is to promote and enhance cooperation with all states, and neighboring states in particular. He said that the deepening of relations among regional states leads to the maintenance and strengthening of security and amity in the region and in the world, and indicated that the Persian Gulf could be kept as the gulf eternal peace, friendship and fraternity through Iranian assistance and coordination. From President Ahmadinejad's point of view, religious, historical, geographical and cultural commonalities of the states of the region bring about very good opportunities for strengthening and promoting brotherly ties. He went on to say that Iran presses for the cause of peace and stability based on justice and compassion, free from the interference of extra-regional elements (Entekhab News Agency, 2007:4).

The Iranian president offered some proposals for the expansion of cooperation and guaranteeing regional security, some of which are as follows:

1. *Creating An Organization for Economic Cooperation:* Given the great capabilities of the seven Persian Gulf littoral states, establishing an economic cooperation organization aimed at making ties more active in the fields of agriculture, energy and transportation, as well as promoting joint ventures and mutual investments, could serve the interests of all nations of the region.

2. *Visa Cancellation Aimed at Facilitating Movement of People:* This would create very good opportunities for movement of the citizens of the seven Persian Gulf littoral states and economic and cultural interaction as well as strengthening of friendly relations between those nations.

3. *Authorization of Ownership of Non-Private Property:* Apart from improving investment security, this would encourage citizens to make long-term and sustained investments. The Islamic Republic of Iran is now ready to receive its brothers.



4. *Joint Ventures in the Oil and Gas Industries:* The development of huge oil and gas reserves, particularly shared ones, are considered as a good opportunity for the expansion of brotherhood through cooperation. Undoubtedly, this would be an important step towards the strengthening of just and sustained ties.

5. *Planning for Free Trade among Persian Gulf Littoral States:* The Islamic Republic of Iran is prepared to participate in promoting free trade with the states of the region and also establishing free trade zones through joint ventures.

6. *Supplying Water and Natural Gas for Brotherly Nations:* The Islamic republic of Iran is prepared to supply potable water and the natural gas required by regional states.

7. *Activating the North-South Corridor:* The corridor plays a very important part in the expansion of trade, strengthening of relations and promotion of peace and security in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to activate the North-South corridor and facilitate and provide the possibility of using its railroads and motorways. It is also prepared to transit energy via this route through joint ventures with regional states.

8. *Developing Tourism:* Given the immensity of pilgrimage and tourist attractions, introduction of these places, persuading citizens to visit each others' countries and providing necessary facilities are very beneficial.

9. *Cooperation in Assisting Islamic States and Poor Countries:* If the political and economic potentials of the Persian Gulf states are brought together, no one would witness the oppression exerted against Islamic nations in Palestine, Sudan or Somalia by outsiders. Moreover, there would be no poverty in Islamic or friendly states and no project without support if financial resources held in Western banks are centralized in a joint bank or the Islamic Development Bank. The security of Persian Gulf states is intertwined and any potential insecurity in any part of the region will impact the security of other states. The regional states have a sufficient ability to preserve



regional security. All littoral states should try to keep the Persian Gulf region free from tension and prevent the transmission of any challenge and insecurity by outsiders. To this end, and to expand security cooperation which could start at any level, the Islamic Republic of Iran proposes the conclusion of a security pact and founding of a security cooperation organization.

*10. Educational, Scientific, Technological and Research Exchanges:* Scientific exchanges could speed up the development of the Persian Gulf states manifold. The Islamic Republic of Iran, given its very valuable achievements in the fields of industry, agriculture, healthcare, medicine and energy, is ready to expand constructive cooperation in these sectors and transfer modern knowledge and technologies through training experts and scientists of neighboring countries.

*11. Cooperation for the Protection of the Environment in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman:* Our lives are dependent on the sustainability of the environment. Protection of the environment and biodiversity is vital and necessary. This important task could be carried out through a collective mechanism (Entekhab News Agency, 2007:3).

For President Ahmadinejad, any action leading to the creation of stronger bonds among regional states and nations will contribute to the protection and strengthening of peace, security and friendliness in the region and in the world. From his point of view, regional states could, in harmony and collaboration, turn the Persian Gulf into a gulf of peace, amity and fraternity. Explaining the outcomes of his visit to Qatar, Ahmadinejad stated: “It seems that a new chapter has been opened in relations between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf”, adding that the declared policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran are based on promoting and enhancing cooperation with all states, and particularly friendly neighbors (Entekhab News Agency, 2007: 4).

At the end of the Doha summit, the Iranian president invited all participants and the GCC's secretary general to attend a meeting in Tehran to consider and discuss all grounds for cooperation (Mehr



News Agency, 2007: 4).

The GCC welcomed proposals made by President Ahmadinejad with regard to the strengthening of ties with its member states. In a statement, the GCC emphasized that these proposals would be considered for the cause of strengthening good relations and mutual respect between the GCC and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as strengthening security and stability in the region (Entekhab News Agency, 2007: 2).

Ahead of the summit, the GCC's secretary general announced in Doha that all of the regional bloc's member states were in favor of Iranian participation in the gathering. Moreover, the *Mehr News Agency* indicated that Abdul Rahman Al-attiyah, in an interview with *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, declared that the idea of President Ahmadinejad attending the summit was not brought up by a single GCC member state but was the collective will of all members of the regional bloc. (Mehr News Agency, 2007: 4).

### Conclusion

The Persian Gulf's position as the cradle of the Islamic and Persian civilizations is very significant, and its role in political and economic interaction is very decisive and important. This region is considered as the most important parts of the world. In the new century, it continues to keep the minds of extra-regional powers preoccupied. The main reason for new alliances and competition over the region is its huge oil and natural gas reserves. Those resources are needed in the whole world, and there is no richer region than the Persian Gulf in this regard. This, has led the topic of security in the region to become the focus of discussions, deliberations and challenges. It seems that the success or defeat of any security arrangement in the Persian Gulf heavily depends on the structure, goals and quality of the interaction among regional states as well as the strategies adopted for ensuring regional security. In the same vein, as the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as one of the most important actors in the security



geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, any plan designed and formulated in this regard is of particular importance for Iran.

The U.S. is attempting to contain and weaken Iran by portraying it as a threat to the region, and exaggerating this threat within the framework of combatting terrorism. Moreover, it is trying to take advantage of the existing divisions and disputes in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf to contain and weaken the Islamic Republic of Iran, pretending that Iran is in a weaker position before its Western allies. However, the Ahmadinejad administration has made use of its approach towards the Persian Gulf and its security problems to exit the situation created by the West, under American leadership.

In the same vein, the foreign policy of Iran with regard to the security geopolitics of the Persian Gulf includes emphasis on regional convergence and cooperation and indigenous security-building, which could be considered as a main security plan in the Persian Gulf region. In this respect, sustainable and peaceful relations should be established among the states of the region, and this security model should naturally include all states located in the region.

The GCC's invitation of Ahmadinejad to its summit in Doha, and the proposals made by the Iranian president with respect to the creation of an environment of amity, cooperation and regional security in the Persian Gulf region, indicates that Iran continues to be considered as a regional power. The invitation is considered as an important step towards the stabilization of friendly relations in the future, a step which could in the long run create a bright and promising outlook for cooperation in all dimensions in the region, free from the pressure and interference of outside powers.

The most important point is that while the Middle East and the Persian Gulf have become the center of political and military pressure of the U.S. and its allies, most of the Iranian diplomatic triumphs has been achieved in this very region. Given these facts, the Ahmadinejad administration's agenda has been topped by efforts to guard the principles of the Islamic Revolution, identity of the Iranian people as



well as Iran's national interests. Under the existing circumstances, the U.S. is trying to continue its presence in the strategic region while using littoral states, and the GCC in particular, to form a new security system through the pursuit of various routes. American strategists are seeking to change the basis of the security system in the Persian Gulf in a way so that the regional states will continue to prioritize military, political and economic relations with the U.S. and allow a continued American military presence.

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