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## **Historical approach toward America's presence stabilization strategy in the Persian Gulf**

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### **Abstract**

Persian Gulf links three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa together and was the center of attention in the past by hegemonic powers to access India from the shortest way but nowadays, Persian Gulf's strategic situation is undeniable. England and the US are among the countries of which presence in Persian Gulf has been more than other powers. After England's claim of soldiers' withdrawal from the region in 1968 until 1971 and ending their military presence in this region and east of Suez, the US tried to fill the gap. The findings of this study revealed that in recent years, military strategy of the US has been higher than others. Plans of US for dominating Persian Gulf, has been based on specific goals, regional special conditions and supporting their allies. This study aims to investigate the reasons of the US presence and its strategies in Persian Gulf region.

**Keywords:** America's Military Strategies, Middle east, British withdrawal, Persian gulf, Great middle east.

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## **1. Introduction**

Persian Gulf links eight countries around it with Indian Ocean so it is considered as a strategic location in the region and many of big powers pay a careful attention to it. Persian Gulf is one of the few locations in the world that has been observed foreign powers presence during history. Britain and the US are among the countries whose presence in the region is more than others.

British kingdom has controlled and plundered the region resources using its military power and their political advisors. During time, Britain had a kind of veto right regarding the changes and competitions of the local countries and foreign governments. Since 1948 to 1968, the US regarded Persian Gulf as Britain's exclusive domain and accepted this in order to prevent Soviet Union from entering this region. After changes in the region and India's independence from Britain, growth of nationalism in the region and financial problems, England decided to leave the region.

This was the beginning of the US entrance into Persian Gulf with hegemonic goals. Oil plays a strategic role in local countries' competence and decision-makings of the US for different governments of the region. Military and nonmilitary strategies of the US in the region have been an outcome of its own benefits or its allies' advantage, among which military strategy has been a more sensed one for dominating the region. Based on what mentioned and considering the fact that western superiority on other powers is achieved through military forces, it is essential for the US to use its military services in order to keep its hegemony and security in the region.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the historical strategy of the US fixing dominance in Persian Gulf region and we will analyze it in detail in following.

## **2. UK and saber rattling in Persian Gulf**

In the following, we note how Britain entered the Persian Gulf and dominated the region during time, using its military power for its benefits.

### **2.1. The Britain in the Persian Gulf**

Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf can be divided into four periods:

#### **2.1.1. Influence period**

On 1616, the East India Company received a command from Shah Abbas the first that allowed them to have business in Iran ports and made it permitted for the company's agents to

enter Iran's port towns. Three years later, this company established a trading house in Jask port (Korzen, 1988: 652). The reason why they chose Jask, was its neighboring to Hurmoz and easier possibility of defending it against Portuguese marine attacks. Among the reasons why Shah Abbas the first, cooperated with this company, we can name the followings:

A) Reduce the Ottoman government revenue from Iran silk exportations what was sent from Aleppo before the cooperation. After the entrance of East India Company, silk export was administered through Persian Gulf.

B) Safavid needed to cooperate with East India Company in order to strengthen their dominance on Persian Gulf's islands and beaches. For this reason, on 1622 a military contract was signed by Iran government and East India Company for expelling Portuguese from Hurmoz Island. It ended in a cooperated attack against Portuguese forces that led to their failure and Portuguese flag pulled down after 100 years on 1622. After that, Hurmoz customs was transferred into Bandar Abbas and the trading house was transmitted from Jask to Bandar Abbas too. At the same time, East India Company established another branch in Basra port. It is worth to mention that Europe's trading to India was done through Mediterranean river, Syria, Iraq, and Persian Gulf (Molzworth yaks, n.d.: 302).

### **2.1.2. Influence development period**

This period begins from the eighteen century. Undoubtedly, Afghan's attach to Iran, the fall of Safavid dynasty, the emergence of Qawasim tribal confederation in Persian Gulf and Karim Khan's willing to develop foreign business led to Britain's higher influence in the region. Karim khan allowed them to build a great trading house in Bushehr with contracting East India Company. Then the residence of Britain's agents changed into Bushehr and continued until 1946 after which residency was transferred to Bahrain with Iran government's insistence (Wilson, 1987: 233).

At the same time, influence of the Netherland was ended in Persian Gulf that was a good news for the British to develop their influence in Persian Gulf. In second half of the eighteen century, all French and Dutch colonies in the region were assigned to East India Company of Britain's government and Britain became the absolute power without rival in the region. This made Persian Gulf even more important for the British government, economically and clearly because the exact time of ships trip from Aleppo to Basra and then to India through Persian Gulf was 5 months. This took 11 months from Cape of Good Hope. As a result, it was better to export goods from Persian Gulf. Britain tried to disunite the regional countries including Iran, Oman, Ottoman, Sharje and Rasolkheim and also between Oman sultan brothers and cousins. This helped Britain's more influence in the region. Residential of East India

Company's political agent was changed into Muscat in 1800 that is the first emirate of Persian Gulf that an agent of the Britain accommodated in (Asadi, 1988: 66-67).

### **2.1.3. Establishing the dominance**

In the early nineteenth century, Britain could defeat Qawasim tribal confederation. The Qawasim had a large fleet of trading and military ships. A key source of revenue for the Qawasim was tolls, which they levied on all trade that passed through the Strait of Hormuz. Britain contracted in 1820 with Persian Gulf's tribal including Ale Khalife Sheikh Ottob that was an enslaving contract, based on which, Britain was allowed to keep its presence until there are unrest and chaos in the region. Based on article number 5 of the contract, all marine commanders of the Britain were allowed to control and supervise the Arab ships transportation. Article number six of the contract forced all Arab rulers of the region to send their agents for receiving political guidelines to Britain. After signing the "basic contract", Persian Gulf beaches entitled "coast pirates"! Bahrain also joined the contract in 1820 forcefully (Elahi, 1994: 68). Bahrian ruler, Sheikh Salman ben Ahmad, tried to be supported by Britain in order to increase its power. Therefore, Bahrain raised Britain's flag on its own residence, and this was when Britain obtained a strong and firm situation in the region (Ghaemmaghami, 1962: 15). Although this opposed with the contract between Iran and Britain that signed a few years ago.

Britain then signed another contract with Arabs called "eternal peace deal" in 1853 through which, Britain was allowed to intervene in any incidence in Persian Gulf beaches. As a result, emirates lost their control power over their beaches to Britain. Since then, these emirates entitled "Agreed banks" (Elahi, 1994: 70).

Britain signed some mandate contracts with Muscat and Kuwait in order to fully control the region. They also occupied Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, with the excuse of fighting Germany and Ottoman threats. This way, they limited Iran power in Persian Gulf region.

While Britain relinquished its direct political control over the region in nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, it retained a great deal of influence and to this day political, economic and military links between Britain and the Gulf States remain strong and tried to keep as them non-united emirates (Asadi, 1988: 63).

### **2.1.4. Acceptance of the British monopoly on the region by European powers**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Great Britain government signed a contract with Ottoman government on 1913 with the aim of increasing its dominance on Persian Gulf

region in which Ottoman government withdraw from Qatar, Oman and Bahrain and in return, Russia, Germany and France accepted exclusive influence of the Britain on Persian Gulf region (Asadi, 1988: 64).

## **2.2. Britain exits Persian Gulf**

Harold Wilson, Prime minister of Britain from Labor Party on January 1968 announced new foreign politics of England in the Middle East and east Suez. He confirmed that they will withdraw their forces from Persian Gulf and east Suez until at most the end of 1971. The reasons were mostly as follows:

- A- Losing colonies such as India, Britain didn't need Persian Gulf as an important way to protect India.
- B- With a rival such as the US in oil benefits of Persian Gulf, protecting and controlling the security of the region was not the sole responsibility of the UK.
- C- Closing Suez Canal after reduction of relations between Egypt and England, led to decreasing the importance of this essential waterway for the Britain.
- D- Independence of England colonies and increasing nationalism in countries including Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, led to increase the possibility of direct conflicts of Britain (Elahi, 1994: 171).

In addition to the mentioned reasons, financial and economic reasons led Britain to exit Persian Gulf in 1971.

## **3. Persian Gulf and the US entrance**

United States of America was far enough from the real conditions of World War II, so didn't deal with much damages and had the required conditions of directly influencing the world changes especially in Persian Gulf after exiting Britain. In the following, we investigate the fields and reasons of the US presence and its decisions in Persian Gulf region.

### **3.1. Presence of the US in Persian Gulf**

After World War II, the US was out of isolation and drew its own foreign politics template for the world. Therefore, in Declaration of the North Atlantic Treaty that tried to prevent Soviet Union influence by supporting anti-communist regimes, we can find an important article related to the US presence in Persian Gulf region, and the Britain committed to exit the region and give the benefits of Oil in Persian Gulf to the US armies (Rohani, 2005: 8). In Middle East, and especially Persian Gulf, after exiting Britain from 1968 to 1971, the US has decided

to fill the gap with its own presence. This is beginning a new era of totalitarian presence of the US in the region.

### **3.2. Strategies of the US presence in Persian Gulf**

An obvious view from the region is not achievable without considering the role of the US in this area. In order to find out the strategies of the US in Persian Gulf and its influences, we should take a deep look at the tactical changes of the US during time which include:

- A- Changes in the political system of America (Vietnam syndrome and its outcomes).
- B- Regional changes such as Iran Islamic revolution of 1979 and Persian Gulf war of 1990.
- C- Changes in international economic and political power distribution including increase of oil price at the beginning of 1970s and the end of cold war in 1991, according to which, the US started to play a more direct role in security issues of Persian Gulf since 1980s and limited the freedom of the local governments in the region. After Iraq occupation in 2003 and fall of Saddam Hussein, the US became like a local player in the region (Fast, 2007: 449-451).

Issues such as world and regional changes, methods, tools and new trends of the White House after September 11 (9/11) are important in the US strategy toward Persian Gulf region. These strategies will be discussed in the following dividing into military and nonmilitary strategies.

#### **3.2.1. Nonmilitary strategies of the US in Persian Gulf**

American politicians tried to avoid their military forces direct intervene in Persian Gulf for the following reasons:

- A- Flowing public opinions of the US people regarding the human and financial losses of Vietnam War made the politicians not to enter the some new regions directly.
- B- Obvious presence of the US forces made Russians to do the same and enter their forces to the region which was not in accordance with the US benefits.
- C- The US tried to localize the region's problems and make the local governments to pay for their security expenses in order to guarantee the free current of oil into western industries. These led to indirect intervene of the US in Persian Gulf region (Asadi, 1988: 73-75). Below, we mention some of the non-military strategies of the US in Persian Gulf region:

### *3.2.1.1. Dioecious policy of the Nixon – Kissinger*

After exit of the UK from Persian Gulf region, US tried to localize the problems in the region in order to as mentioned, fill the power gap. But in this way, the US needed to empower Iran and Saudi Arabia as two columns in the region, of which Iran was more important because of its neighboring with Soviet Union. On the other hand, Pahlavi government has good relations with Israel and didn't treat it like Arabia. United States of America administered dioeciously policy of the Nixon in order to support the security of the area by Iran and Saudi Arabia as political, economic and military centers of the US. Pahlavi regime declared that Persian Gulf is Iran's vital region and keeping Hurmoz opened, is very important for Iranian organizers. Persian Gulf was the only way of exporting oil to the world markets so it was essential to protect the oil resources and facilities. As a result, Iran believed that regional security must be achieved by the beach countries' cooperation. So, Iran asked for a joint security pact with Persian Gulf countries (Asadi, 1988: 70-72).

Pahlavi government tried to pretend that all these innovative security orders are the innovation of its own. Howaida, the prime minister of the time, believed:

Iran politics are always based on believing regional cooperation. But an issue must be cleared, that means the so-called cooperation doesn't mean that countries out of the region can intervene the area. Iran as the most powerful government in the region that owns northern banks of the Persian Gulf, is firmly interested in providing stability and security in the region. As a result, we shouldn't let the US or the UK enter the area without our permission (Jafari Waldani, 1988: 422).

While the US was the real organizer of the region new political model who returned the dynasty to Iran king after the Coup in August 28 and fall of Mosadeq government. As a result, the US needed a powerful friendly country in the region to guarantee their benefits in future (Asadi, 1988: 78). So they empowered Pahlavi government which made it a performer of western benefits in the region.

### *3.2.1.2. Role of the US after September 11*

September 11 events in 2001, was a turning point in international relations and entering the third millennium. It was the beginning of a new era in political, economic, social and cultural system of the world. It was only during the World War II that the US made Japanese attack to Pearl Harbor as a turning point in international politics and joining the allies who considered Russia as their ally in war against Nazi Germany, changed the power balance to its own allies

and became a super power in future. Again, in September 11, the US who was the only winner of the cold war, benefited from it completely (Asadi, 2002: 62).

Regarding what mentioned above, it was a good opportunity after September 11<sup>th</sup> for neo conservatives to enter the field and theorize the politics based on power and restore the US hegemony in a new atmosphere.

From this point of view, and according the neo conservatives point of view, they can use military force in order to achieve democracy. As a result, using force and military power were regarded as the new backing diplomacy of the US even without the international support (Sajadpour, 2003: 7). In the past, US strategy was against dictator governments who threat the US benefits by organized military forces, however, recently, networks and groups with a non-governmental nature such as Taliban threat US benefits asymmetrically and the US must attack these groups to exterminate them (Asadi, 2002: 61).

In this context, considering the principle that western dominance over other powers, is achieved using military and force power, the US is committed to gain strong safety margins, needs to strengthen its military power and threaten the competitors by showing off its power.

### *3.2.1.3. Great Middle East initiative*

After September 11, 2001, in which terrorism fighting became a dominant issue in foreign policies of the US, Middle East was considered as the center of gravity of the world. Decision makers and politicians of the US made a link between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism used force to weaken Islam and considered the Middle East as the center of international terrorism (Dabiri, 2001: 1).

General Colin Powel, minister of foreign affairs of America, in a lecture on September 12, 2002, in Heritage fund declared the plan of the US for the Middle East for the first time. One of the excuses for attacking Iraq was three-fold of "fighting against terrorism", "weapons of mass destruction" and "establishing a model government in order to develop democracy in the region based on Democratic domino logic".

George Bush, president of the US on February 26, 2003, before the military attack of the US to Iraq, in a lecture in Enterprise American Institute said that he is determined to establish democratic values in the Middle East and then, at May 9<sup>th</sup>, the same year, he suggested the establishment of a free region between the US and the Middle East in 10 years (Asadi, 2002: 63-65).

Goals and benefits of the US in great Middle East plan are as follows:



#### *3.2.1.3.1. Controlling fundamentalism*

At the present time, it is clear why Iraq is important for the US, because American politicians consider fundamentalism as their most important ideological enemy and believes that Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran are the center of this ideology. Iraq is located between these three countries so it has a geopolitical importance for the US. In fact, attacking Iraq on one hand, led to fall of Saddam Hussein who considered to be a supporter of Al-Qaeda, and on the other hand, the US could control and supervise these three countries by occupying Iraq. Presence of the US close to Iran, Syria and the Saudi Arabia led to increase pressures on Islamic movement of the region (Dabiri, 2001: 23).

#### *3.2.1.3.2. Legitimize Israel*

Before the Great Middle East plan, the US had a quadratic plan between the US, European Union, Russia and the United Nations organizations, with the aim of establishing peace between Arabs and the Israel until 2005 which was called "road map". But because of the "Iron fist" of Sharon, it ended in failure and didn't succeed. Therefore, the US tried to participate Israel in the Great Middle East initiative (Dabiri, 2001: 24).

#### *3.2.1.3.3. Dominating the oil market and penetration in commercial market of the region*

Middle East owns almost 70 percent of the world's oil resources among which Iraq with production rate of 7 million daily with less than 25 million population, is the second owner of the oil resources. OPEC as an important economical organization on which the US could not control, is the main aim of the US. OPEC produced daily 23 million of oil barrels plays a powerful role in the oil market. In this new situation, Iraq with the whole oil resources of 120 million barrels, of which control is by the US, can challenge the OPEC dramatically. This is a good opportunity for the US politicians to pressure the region countries strategically and reduce their power over the region especially Saudi Arabia. Also, Bush suggested a new commercial market establishment in the region, that some experts consider it harmful for the regional countries of Persian Gulf (Dabiri, 2001: 25-26).

#### *3.2.1.3.4. Political pressurizing over Islamic Republic of Iran*

There are some changes for the regional countries in this initiative such as political, educational and economical modifications. Iran after revolution of 1979, was changed into a country against the US policies that made a lot problems for the US governments such as

Jimmy Carter's failure at the second period of presidency and the US embassy takeover of 1980. McFarlane scandal in Ronald Reagan and George Bush senior, are yet considered as Iran Gate issues (Mohamadi, 2003: 159). Considering all these issues plus three islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, Islamic fundamentalism and Iran peaceful nuclear activities, democracy and human rights are other issues the US has with Islamic Republic of Iran. The US aims at firstly control the Islamic revolution ideology and limit it to the inside borders of Iran and cut down the spiritual supports of Iran from Palestine. For this reason, American and Israeli officials consider Iran as a serious threat for their own politics and politicians such as Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Perry regard Iran as the top peak of Islam world against West, to the extent that William Perry claims that;

Iran is a serious threat for Israel and its main Arab partners such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and other moderate governments of the Persian Gulf region. On the other hand, Iran is a populated country in Persian Gulf region in which religious democracy models are forming and the number of educated population in Iran after the revolution is higher than the neighboring countries, as a result, the US will be able to democratize the Middle East via dominating Iran (Mohamadi, 2003: 156-158).

### **3.2.2. Military strategies**

Military doctrine is a set of theories, beliefs, viewpoints and fundamental principles accepted and supported nationally that is expressed by the country political-military leaders based on the doctrines including national security, military ruling thought, historical background and situation of the military forces, previous experiences, beliefs, technologic and scientific developments, national capacities and geographical characteristics of the country.

The US confrontation with the third world of which roots back to the colonialism, is not constrained to the post-cold-war era. European colonialism was dominated a huge part of the world which was called "the third world" aftermath, could develop using military invasion and suppression of the Asian, African and Latin American societies. After ending the colonialism era, and when World War II ended, the US entered the military conflicts around the world. The damages for the US in these conflicts were minimum but the third world countries tolerated huge losses. A sample of these interventions was cooperated English-American Coup against Mosadegh at 1953, American Coup against national government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and American invasion to Dominican Republic in 1964 and Panama in 1989. Regarding the potential possibility of instability in the region, the US

started its military policy that can help stabilize the region. This politics make it possible for the US to take the responsibility of the security of a few countries without requiring any ground army in the area permanently. When Reagan was the president of the US, all warfare of the country were ready for military invasion in the Persian Gulf. In addition, Reagan government considered the third world as the scene for conflict between the West and the East. From the beginning of the 1980s, Washington found out that the danger of the Soviet Union is gradually changing into the southwest of the Asia. New government of the US believed that threats in the Persian Gulf area whether from the religious or non-religious forces could challenge the US benefits in the region (Entesar, 1995: 307-308). Based on the above conditions, we mention some factors influential in the US strategies in the region:

#### *3.2.2.1. Iraq attack to Kuwait and its failure by the US and its allies*

During one decade, the world witnessed two invasions of one country to its neighbors. Iraq Baasist regime attacked Iran in 1980 to Islamic Republic of Iran and began a war that took eight years and killed many people and remained lots of damages. Again, Iraq attacked Kuwait in 1990 and occupied the country immediately and established a temporary government in Kuwait. But it failed by the Security Council resolution in operations called "desert storm" after which Iraq accepted all the conditions of resolution (Zamani, 1997: 5-7).

The US politics in forming an international alliance against Iraq had two aspects: first, attempts of the US to increase its presence in Arabic and Islamic countries of the region. Maybe since military intervention of a sole-western alliance in Arabic Islamic countries was not acceptable by the Islamic countries, but intervention of the US in operations against Iraq was considered as a punishment of wrongdoers of the Arab family who tried to disturb regional peace and stability. The second aspect was the US attempts to absorb the attention of the Soviet Union and issuance of the Security Council resolutions and then justify its alliance against Iraq internationally (Molayi, 1994: 96-97).

#### *3.2.2.2. Attacking Iraq and the third crisis of Persian Gulf*

War in Iraq started at the last hours of 2002 and ended after 21 days with fall of Saddam Hussein government. Although it lasted less than one month, but it had some serious, permanent, wide and long lasting effects, some of which were predictable and pre-organized but some were influenced by the changes in Iraq after Saddam Hussein fall (Yazdan Fam, 2004: 11). The 2003 invasion of Iraq has become the largest, longest, and most costly use of armed force by the United States since the Vietnam War. It is the first major post-cold-war

U.S. military action taken apart from an international organization and the first U.S. experience as an occupying power in a Middle Eastern country.

### *3.2.2.3. Attacking Taliban*

According to the statements of offensive realism approach and also, this issue that protective attacks after 9/11, 2001 verified as the US national security strategy, we must mention the US presence in Afghanistan after 9/11, 2001 and its threats for the rest of the region, because after the attacks, the US found itself in a situation that it would be possible for reduction off the power. United States of America was following the below aims at attacking Afghanistan: it was seeking to make the power war between Islam civilization and the western civilization, as an ideological trend and on the other hand, it tried to inhibit the potential and actual powers of the region from strengthening. The US wanted to compromise with the moderate Islam and fight against the extremist Islam. In fighting against extremist Islam, they should keep Afghanistan still occupied in order to inhibit the opposite powers including China, Russia and Iran (Javadi Arjmand, 2008: 87).

The most obvious effects of 9/11 are discussable in two ways: first, the US forgot about its multi-dimensional policy after cold war and forwarded into a single-dimension policy and fixing a new world order. Secondly, the US tried to establish an international alliance against terrorism, that attacking Afghanistan was its first point. The US attacked Afghanistan via forming an anti-terrorism alliance in order to killing the enemy forces of Taliban group and Al-Qaeda network who were the main suspects of 9/11, 2001 (Shafiee, 2013: 90).

## **Conclusion**

Persian Gulf links eight countries around it with Indian Ocean and is considered as a strategic region by the western powers. It had been always the center of attention and observed the presence of foreign powers during time. Britain and the US are two most important powers present in the area. Factors such as losing their vital colony (India), financial problems and independence of Arabian countries, made Britain leave the Persian Gulf and empty the area for the US to fill the gap and enter the region. Issues such as changing political system of the US after Vietnam War, Iran Islamic revolution, increasing the oil prices have been influential in more presence and role-playing of the US in Persian Gulf region.

United States of America has initiated some special military and non-military strategies in recent years in order to stabilize its economic and political domination over the Persian Gulf region, among which cases such as the US leadership in anti-Iraq alliance in Kuwait war,

attacking Iraq and occupation of Afghanistan fighting with Taliban are worth to mention. Also, some new influential strategies such as dioecious policy of the Nixon – Kissinger, role playing after September, 11 (9/11) and great Middle East initiatives are among the plans, the US had for the Persian Gulf region.

Recent movements and activities of the US in the region are based on a series of interests and special goals of which the most important are:

Impact on oil market, protecting the regional stability benefiting the regional allies' especially Arabian countries around the Persian Gulf, over-pressuring Islamic Republic of Iran, supporting Israel against regional currents, prohibiting the weapons of mass destruction, and fighting terrorism.

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