

The Iranian Challenge to Gulf Security

Fawaz A*

University of Bologna, Argentina

*Corresponding author: Fawaz A, Professor, University of Bologna, Argentina, Tel: +54 11 4570-3000; E-mail: alqahtany_q8@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This study attempts to analyze the Iranian challenge to Gulf security, as Iran aims to dominate the Middle East region, so the study focuses on the imbalance of power between two sides.

Also the study dealt with the differences issues between Tehran and the Gulf countries like, The Three UAE Islands, Iran's nuclear program, Tehran's interference in Arab affairs, particularly in the crisis in Syria and Yemen.

Keywords: Challenge; Security; Witness; Ambitions; Dominant

Introduction

Since the discovery of oil reserves in many newly emerging Gulf State's (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain), this region has become the center of world interest as an important source of energy [1].

As a result of that, many regional powers tried to control the Gulf region, including Iran. Thus, relations between Tehran and the Gulf countries have witnessed many tensions [2] from time to time, as there are many issues that are a source of conflict between the Gulf States and Iran, like occupation of Iran for Emirates islands (Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb) in 1971 [3].

So During the Shah's period, Tehran aims to increase its regional power and fill vacuum which happened after the withdrawal of British forces from the region. At that time, the Shah was seeking to build the Iranian army and achieve its ambitions to control the Gulf through many methods like [4]:

- Achieving a dominant position in the Gulf region and in the Middle East in a general, as they refused the establishment of strong Arab state on its borders.
- Maintain special relations with Israel as the two countries convergence in countering radical currents in the region.
- Ensuring and protecting the security of the Gulf region, that goal which evolved from protecting the Gulf according to traditional security rules to achieving securing the Arabian coast from any internal or external influences that can be effect the requirements of Iranian security, as this mater make Iran during this period remain in counter with the Arab radical regimes like Nasser.

After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 there was a shift in Iranian foreign policy and its relations with the superpowers, including the United States of America. As Ayatollah Khomeini asserted in one of his most speech that "Iran could turn the Gulf into a ball of fire if any one tries to harm Iran [5]" after that they put this policy into practice, and tried to spread the revolution across the border, as Khomeini stated clearly in his first annual statement after the revolution 1980 " We are working to export our revolution to various parts of the world." In addition he describes the regimes in the region

as non-Islamic and calling for the end of these regimes", the mater doesn't stop in words, but Tehran involved in a coup in Bahrain and Encouraged to break out of the ruling regimes in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia [6].

So this revolution was really a great obstacle for Gulf States, because this state's includes Shiite component in her population, and Iran aims to export their revolution a border, Also the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

As Iraq was more afraid of the new trend in Iran; considering the Iraqi Shiite component, these variables were a major reason for the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. Which Iran considered a consecration of its policy of exclusion against it? [7].

After the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, Iran found itself replacing the Soviet Union, which was a source of danger to the Gulf States, and that came synchronization with Iraq invasion Kuwait in 1990, that mater lead to increase the influence of west countries in gulf states, and that make Iran realize that this policy will isolate it from the rest of the Arabian Gulf, so they declare that she is independent state and rejects US policy in the region [8].

But after Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani came to power in 1989, he aims to extend confidence to the surrounding countries, especially the Gulf States, as he adopted the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the others countries, and after that he declares refusal of Iran for Iraq invasion for Kuwait, and become neutrality for two sides [9].

And with the arrival of the President Mohammad Khatami to power in Iran (1997-2004), some consider this will lead to improve the relation between Gulf States and Iran, as the two sides had a common conviction of the inevitability of the development of relations [10].

But after the American intervention in Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq in 2003, Iran's relations with the Gulf were affected again, as the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime increased Shi'ite influence in Iraq, Which led to a strategic change in the map of the region, and led to a breach of regional balance of power in favor of Tehran.

This has helped to disrupt the military balance in the Gulf region in favor of Iran. In real terms, there is a lack of complementarity and

reciprocity between the armed forces of the GCC countries, in other side Iran has a relatively advanced nuclear program [11].

After Ahmadinejad came to power in Iran, Tehran sought to build an important regional power, taking advantage of the significant rise in oil prices and the geopolitical environment, which changed dramatically because of direct US military intervention in Iraq in March 2003. As Iraq turned into an Iranian sphere of influence, Likewise, Iran benefits from the regional and international isolation for Bashar al-Assad regime after the speak about involved of Syrian regime in the operation of assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Iran also exploited the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in 2006 and the aggression on Gaza in early 2009 to make itself a leader of the "resistance" axis and a party that cannot be exceeded in the balance of the Arab-Israeli conflict [12].

So the objectives of the Iranian policy towards Gulf States during the period of President Ahmadinejad were as follows [13]:

- Prevent the involvement of Gulf States in the international pressure on it because of its nuclear program.
- Avoiding exposure to international isolation because of its differences with the West and Israel.
- Invest regional and international conditions in order to maximize the Iranian role in the region.
- Prevent the formation of a united Gulf front against Iran, by playing on the differences between the Gulf States.
- Convince the United States to negotiate with it and recognize its regional role.
- Supporting the political demands of the Shiites in the neighboring Gulf States, especially in light of the wave of revolutions and uprisings calling for reform in the Arab world.

Issues of Divergence between the Gulf States and Iran

We should note that the Relations between Tehran and the Gulf states witnessed tensions from time to time, and there are many issues that are the source of the conflict between two sides, so we can explore issues that cause tension, like:

The Nuclear program

On 14 July 2015, following two years of intense talks, the P5+1 and Iran reached the JCPOA as a blueprint for a diplomatic resolution to the nuclear crisis. Iran agreed to significantly limit its nuclear activities. On 20 July 2015, the Security Council adopted resolution 2231 endorsing the JCPOA. On 18 October 2015 (known as Adoption Day), the JCPOA officially entered into force [12].

Prior to the arrival of President Barack Obama to power, he saw Iran as a threat to US national security and US interests in the region. In June 2008, Obama stressed that Iran represents the greatest threat in the Middle East, there is no danger to Israel's security and stability in the region is greater than Iran [13].

But soon the issues had changed between the Obama administration and Tehran, and emerged in his a congratulatory message to the Iranian people and his leadership, also the messages exchanged since 2009 between Obama and the Supreme Guide on Khamenei [14]. So the matter was ended with the signature of agreement for solving the Iranian nuclear program.

So we find that the administration of President Barack Obama after the conclusion of the nuclear agreement with Tehran, invited the

leaders of the Gulf states to the Camp David meeting, which United States declared remains committed to Gulf security, and the administration confirmed that it sought to conclude this agreement to serve security in the Gulf in fact, the Gulf States fear the consequences of this agreement on their national security, and this agreement may lead to the American-Iranian rapprochement, and that effect on the American policy towards gulf region to protect the security of the Gulf's [15].

Syrian crisis

The Gulf were keen not to rush into entering the crisis line, so in August 2011 King Abdul Aziz asked all the Syrian people to stop violence, after that the Kingdom summoned its ambassador in Damascus to consult, as the gulf states fear from Iranian roles in this crisis, which can be linked to the Iranian encirclement for gulf states via Bahrain, Iraq and Yemen [16].

So we found gulf states support opposition of Syrian president, and played great role in the Syrian war which have continued for five years, but its role can be described as influential, but not decisive. Deeply hostile to the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and its Iranian allies, the Gulf States – in particular Qatar and now predominantly Saudi Arabia – have sought to build a credible, alternative opposition coalition that would replace the regime and usher in a new system of government that removes any vestiges of Assad's family from power and rolls back Iran's presence in the country. Support for the opposition has extended to trying to directly influence the military course of the war [17].

Yemen crisis

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia became very uncomfortable when the Yemenese or Yemenite movement of the Houthi or Ansarallah gained control of Yemen's capital, Sanaa/Sana, in September 2014 [17].

As Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states have accused the Houthis of being a proxy for Iran, the region's Shiite superpower. The Houthis themselves deny this. Some outside sources have also suggested a link, however. In fact Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran who all claimed that Tehran had supplied money, weapons and training to the Houthi [17].

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