Strategic Competition of Iran and the USA in the Persian Gulf Region

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Abstract

Regarding the limited resources, the current article tries to explain the special competitive environment between Iran and the US under the title of strategic competition of Iran and the US. The most threatening competitive place for these two countries is the existence of a region called the Persian Gulf creating this competition in the military and security cases. This rivalry and its survey has complicated angles surveying the geography of the region and its historical background and then it surveys the demands of Iranian and American governments and then it criticizes their effects on each other, effects such as missile and nuclear debates, status of governments and comments of defense and political experts; then it surveys the superiority of Iran and the US in the symmetric and asymmetric wars and necessities, sanctions and its effects on Iran. However, what is definite is that regarding the difference of attitude between these two countries, a different era is expected in which these two countries find an attitude and strategy close to each other.

Keywords: the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, the US, Islamic Republic of Iran, Security Ideas, Trans-Regional Responsibilities, Military Competition, Sanction, Asymmetric Warfare.
Introduction

The Persian Gulf region has always been the center of attention and the place of effective events in the world. From the tensions existing between the regional governments on changing its name, even with the certainty that its name is Persian Gulf, to the huge resources of oil and gas, Iran’s efforts for keeping and preserving its real position in the region, the confluence of three continents and the extensive consumer market in countries near the Persian Gulf, could be the reasons for conflicts between the trans-regional countries and also the stronger presence of some other countries such as the US. After the withdrawal of Russia and England in the recent decades and also after the withdrawal of Portugal in many years ago, the US has found its place in the region and has created special financial and strategic benefits for itself. These benefits encountered some fluctuations after the Islamic Revolution and the change of Iranian government and also the US faced some new challenges for preserving this position.

As a geopolitical unit, the Persian Gulf region is like a living creature that actively has a wide connection with the environment outside itself and its exports include oil and gas and its imports include industrial goods, foodstuff and other things needed by its citizens. The Persian Gulf is a semi-enclosed sea situated in South West Asia and created a gap in East Asian peninsula. This gulf is situated in 23-30° northern latitude and 48-56° eastern longitude. Persian Gulf is considered as a very hot region and its heat during the summer is intolerable. The latitude of this region is variable between 185-333 kilometers and the length of its shore from Al-Faw peninsula to Bandar Abbas is 1375 kilometers; and its depth is between 25-35 meters. This gulf has been known with the name of Persian Gulf since a long time ago. Some other names include Pars Sea and Sinus Persicus. In the book of the Limits of the World this sentence is written: The Persian Gulf is derived from Pars with limited width as the deed.

Since the 16th centuries the maritime powers set foot in this region; countries such as the Netherlands, England and France. These countries gradually created military bases and established their commercial facilities. Meanwhile, England had a more prominent role and they even called it the exclusive sea of England. The Persian Gulf is important because of four different factors:

1- Geographical location
2- Extensive oil and gas reserves
3- Consumer market
4- Ideological and cultural role
This finds its meaning with a look at the title of the main connection center of three continents; Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.
With this attitude it is clear that this region is always important to the regional and trans-regional governments.

The US has always encountered challenges with Iran after the WWII and especially after the Islamic Revolution and a summary of these challenges are discussed here.
The Strategic Importance of the Persian Gulf
As it was mentioned in the introduction, this region in the world is the center of attention of world powers. Sergeant Arnold Wilson says: there is no sea in the world attracting the attention of experts, historians, geographers, politicians and warriors all at the same time.

Lord Curzon, viceroy of India says: I consider assignment of a harbor in the Persian Gulf to Russia or any other world power as a curse to England and consider the destruction of the current situation as a stimulation of war and I blame the Minister of the Great Britain.

The Us government as a newly found power in 1971 became a substitution for England and made some serious changes in the region. The Persian Gulf region is one of the most important strategic regions in the international stage. They try to manage their security aims through attracting the friendly countries in order to gain facilities and create military bases for progressing in military operations; in this regard they manage and change the strategic situation and improve it by controlling the oil and gas reserves and the consumer market and play a central role; and this results in adopting a competitive stand among the superpowers on the Persian Gulf region.

On the other hand, the achieved financial resources in this region rapidly go toward the European and American markets and again they trap in the security projects of these superpowers by new cycle of selling weapons and equipping their region. The Saudi Arabia as one of the biggest importers of weapons has an important role in this matter. The region powers have a tremendous share in this policy whether in war time or peace. Mentioning that for each one billion dollars around 75 thousand jobs in weaponry, 92 thousand jobs in transportation, 100 thousand jobs in building, 187 thousand jobs in education, 139 thousand jobs in hygiene are produced then the importance of arm deals are clarified.

**The Security Ideas in the Persian Gulf**

There have been convergent ideas in the Persian Gulf region for forming and establishing a structure for collective security but due to dominance of divergent forces on convergent forces, this structure has not been formed correctly and these links have created as bilateral and multilateral treaties. These convergent could be intra-regional or trans-regional. David Petraeus says: regarding the importance of its resources and its potentiality for crisis and insecurity, the Arabian Peninsula is at the center of our attention and these structures strengthen these treaties. Iran and 7 countries around the Persian Gulf coast have military bases with different portions. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Emirates have the most coastal bases. On the other hand, it is observed that these security ideas are unavoidable because of the following reasons and this result in reducing the possibility of formation of a consistent security in the region.

Discontinuity in the structure of power in the region, superiority of divergent forces on convergent forces, geopolitical interests and concerns, conflict pattern in the region, dominance of the regional and trans-regional powers are some of the main patterns of this structure. This fragile structure provides the base for presence of interferes and especially the foreign forces in this region. The mutual effect of ruptured strength in the region results in intervention and presence of world forces and powers.
Reasons to Divergence and Convergence in this Region

Reasons to Convergence
Religious commonalities, neighborhood sense, mutual needs, mutual threats, mutual dependence, different functions in the production and export of fossil energy.

Reasons to Divergence
Different religious and political attitudes, sense of national and historical pride of the Iranian people, religious difference in the north and south, tribal differences, long history of the current government in the region such as Iran, competition pattern, territorial disputes, communication patterns, trans-regional commitments, mutual sense of threat, difference in superstructures between north and south.

The Role of Iran in the Persian Gulf Region
There are different reasons and motivations for the presence of Iran in this region and it is based on some inherent and acquired rights.

Inherent Rights:
The Iran’s ownership on the north part of the Persian Gulf is a clear and accepted concept that has resulted in rehabilitation of this right; Iran's omnipresence in the region with playing this role for providing the region security has provided a situation that has resulted in preserving the sea, sea bed, Persian Gulf area; a reality that Iran has always been following.

Exploitation of the Available Resources
Each country uses its resources based on its geography and its needs and this is a necessity for omnipresence.

Economical and Commercial Activities:
Import and export of goods justifies that Iran should use the maximum available resources.

Important Vicinity:
Being in the neighborhood of the northern countries of Iran is a special benefit and it is the lucrative market in transfer of goods and services through sea to the overland rout in the nrth of the country.

Trans-regional and International Responsibilities
Iran with the name of an independent country which is one of the oldest countries of the world benefits in many relations in the region and the world.

Finally it is mentioned that the presence of Iran beside or against many trans-regional countries is felt very severely.

Role of the US in the Region
The US is a vast and populated country with climate variability and great natural resources and it as the first economic place in the world. This geography has made the US a powerful country and it is after having an effect on other parts of the world; thus the US is a country with an inner structure and introvert and at the same time it has tendency toward having beneficial relationships with other countries. The same as any other powerful country, the US is also after using the facilities of the Persian Gulf region and especially its oil. It signed its first contract in 1832 with Oman regarding the commercial seafaring matters; with this contract the oil discovery in Bahrain which was supervised by the British, was handed to the US and this resulted in a contract with Bahrain in 1932 and formation of relations between these two countries. In later years and in 1943, 1945 and 1947, US strengthened its presence in this region. After WWII the US bailout
plan for the countries around this region which was based on Article 4 Truman, expanded the presence and influence of the US on this region and this increased the long term presence of the US in this region and its dominance on Iran. England had an active presence in the countries of this region except the Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabia also provided the base for presence of the US; thus the first contracts were conducted between these two countries and the US was obliged to transfer weapons and to train its forces to this country in exchange for establishing military bases.

US was after special goals in this region that were resulted from values hidden in this region and that had vital value for this country-access to oil, region market, controlling the region and the strait of Hormuz, coping with other powerful countries, coping with Iran- these are always considered by the US.

Harold Brown the Secretary of Defense in 1980 states the US aims as follow:
1. Guaranteeing access to sufficient oil
2. Resistance against spread and influence of the Soviet Union
3. Establishing stability in the region
4. Developing the peace process in the Middle East

He adds that 13% of the US oil, 45% of the Germany oil, and 75% of the France and Japan oil are provided from this region. Carter states that: it is necessary that everybody understands our position regarding the Persian Gulf; and any measure taken by the foreign forces for dominating this region is a measure taken against the national benefits of the US and it is going to be defended by all means including military forces.

George Bush states: the same as previous presidents of the US, my government is committed to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf.

Thus it could be concluded that the US is after three economic, political and strategic goals in this region.

One of the economic goals of the US is dominance on and access to the oil reserves for competing with china, japan and Europe and also dominance on the sales of the consumer products.

Based on the Brzezinski plan, strategic aims of this country include creating the third line of defense after the US and Europe in the Persian Gulf including defending from investors and their allies.

The political dimension include: taking the responsibility of providing the security of the Persian Gulf region and shipping lines, preventing from influence and spread of the rivals, taking the responsibility of managing the collective/international actions in the Persian Gulf events, taking the responsibility of managing and guiding the activities and making efforts for creating peace between the Arabs and Israel, improving collaboration of the Persian Gulf against Iran, spreading cultural activities against the Iranian thought through improving the Saudi Arabia government, making efforts for formation of political and security formations in the region and guiding them as the intermediate ring between them and the region countries.
The US uses different strategies for reaching these aims; some of these strategies include collaboration with the Saudi Arabia, establishing military bases, diplomatic activities in the region, reducing the attention of the region small countries to other countries. Evidence proving the US need for presence in this region is that after the Islamic Revolution the US rapidly entered this region for equipping the Saudi Arabia and did this with making a 6.4 billion dollar contract given to Harold Brown in 1979. Changing the delivery of four AWACS aircraft from Iran to Saudi Arabia, repeated arming of the Saudi Arabia and modernizing the army were some of these measures.

This strategy was a deterrence strategy named arc of crisis theory by the US.

The US Attitude toward the Islamic Revolution of Iran

The US follows three patterns in this regard: threat and isolation, understanding and cooperation. As it is observed in these three patterns the US tries to:

- Create a new enemy in this region to have a permanent presence and uses the terrorism label, anti-human rights to perform its role with a dual containment strategy.
- In the second pattern with calling the problems of Iran to be temporary it tries to provide a middle way.
- In the third pattern Iran is not a threat anymore and the US tries to develop the relations and this pattern is the result of thoughts of the economic firms.

The US Axes and Mechanisms for Confronting Iran:
- Using the human rights weapon in Iran
- Accusation of resorting to force or threat in the form of terrorism
- Accusing Iran to making efforts for reaching nuclear weapons
- Military blockade of Iran
- Stimulating the southern countries of the Persian Gulf
- Economic blockade of Iran
- Making efforts for creating peace between Arabs and Israel

These were all the US strategies for fighting against Iran that were listed here.

The Iran’s Axes and Mechanisms for Confronting the US

- Making efforts for leaving isolation
- Expanding relations with the countries around the Persian Gulf in all political and economic aspects
- Expanding trans-regional cooperation
- Strait of Hormuz and its political and military Role
- Geographical factors have a significant role in analyzing the regional problems, the military ideas and predicting the strategic horizons. History has shown that the role of combat power has a special importance in the land and in the fate of war; and basically wars happen in the land and the sea has a supporting role.
- Mahan says: controlling the Persian Gulf by a foreign government with navy forces and warships result in dominating all routes ending to Far East, India and Australia.
- This resulted in paying attention to preserving the transfer of great resources of energy, minerals, and energy of the sea; and Strait of Hormuz has this unique feature.
Definition of competition: viewing the subject of competition among the powers in the geopolitical area, it is possible to provide a definition that could clarify this word. Conflict or contest between two governmental systems or two countries in the geographical space outside their borders in any part of the political world for overtaking each other is called competition.

The importance of Persian Gulf for surveying the historical documents

There are many documents in the historical periods emphasizing on the importance of Persian Gulf resulting in creating a permanent and long term competition and we briefly mention them and they could be overviewed as a list.
Document No. 27: 26/Aug/1961 the ministry of the foreign affairs in that time points out the title of contents of journals of Iraq related to oil, Persian Gulf and the role of Iran in this region, and its power in the Persian Gulf region.
Document No. 67: 17/Feb/1968 the ministry of the foreign affairs in that time points out the title of Iran’s politics in the Persian Gulf mentioning maintaining the security of Persian Gulf after the English troop withdrawal.
Document No. 71: 30/Mar/1968 the ministry of the foreign affairs in that time points out the title of Iran’s politics in the Persian Gulf mentioning the fear of Persian Gulf countries of the Iran’s power and the mutual needs of the Russia and the US to the Persian Gulf oil and the effects of Iran.
Document No. 82: 14/Feb/1974 the ministry of the foreign affairs in that time points out the title of the changed balance of power in Persian Gulf related to an article named the changed balance of power in Persian Gulf. This article introduces Iran as a big country with 31 million population having the main power in the Persian Gulf; since this country is not an Arabic country, accepting this matter is very hard for the Arabs and Iran considered itself as a substitute for England and it was after its historical role after the Achaemenians and Sassanids and other historical periods.
Factors Affecting the Foreign Politics:
Following their domestic needs and the geographical and geopolitical situation and also due to the effect of international structure, the governments follow special orientations and strategies for meeting their needs and aims. These factors include historical and cultural contexts, values and beliefs, domestic problems and public opinion, the overall picture of the international politics, and the structure of international system. In this regard, we take a closer look at the strategic competition of these two countries.

The Current Pattern of Structure of Military Competition of Iran and the US:

Although the world tends toward focusing on Iran’s nuclear program, the current military competition patterns of Iran, the US and the Arab neighbors of Iran have four important dimensions that could have links with Iran’s nuclear program.
A) Iran’s conventional forces
Iran tries to improve its conventional forces in a way to spread its influence and limit the US military options.
The final conclusion or effort in the Persian Gulf is continuation and strengthening of challenges of Iran with the US in the Persian Gulf and especially in the areas of air, missile and sea battles and also in the US effort for providing military support and transferring military equipment to Persian Gulf Cooperation Council states and Israel.

B) Asymmetric and irregular war

Iran has made significant efforts for improving its empowerment in the area of asymmetric war and using these forces for imposing pressure, threatening or attacking other powers with the methods difficult for the US to cope with.

Iran’s efforts have focused on developing the progressed empowerments in the area of asymmetric war on improving the empowerments of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution; but these empowerments affect all dimensions of security and military efforts of Iran. Any weapon or any force could be used with asymmetric, irregular and/or mixed methods.

Iran’s military efforts for competing with the US and its neighbors through developing the progressed empowerments in the asymmetric war area could not be separated from Iran’s emphasis on missiles and weapons of mass destruction; both compensate the limits of Iran’s conventional forces and they act as a substitution. However, if Iran reaches nuclear weapon, this status at least affects the application of deterrent against any reaction to tendency of Iran toward asymmetric war.

C) Spread of Operation Area and Influence Areas

The strategic center of military competition between Iran and the US is on the efforts of Iran for improving the military empowerment of Iran in Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman; however nowadays it has spread to a wide area of the Middle East and North Africa, Middle Asia and South Asia and beyond these.

D) Missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Iran has the sufficient power for producing chemical weapon; it has ballistic missiles and it could also produce biologic weapons and it seems that for having influence on its neighbors it is after reaching nuclear weapon. The US tries to prevent Iran from reaching nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles; and at the same time if Iran succeeds there must be some options for deterring and defending against Iran.

Different National Perspectives:
The same as any other aspect of competition between Iran and the US, the military competition takes form based on political perceptions and scanning of Iran, the US and other countries.

A) Perceptions of the US

American policy makers and programmers try to focus on a complete range of military empowerments of Iran; because this empowerment has an effect on the whole region, the
comments and also the non-governmental actions outside the Persian Gulf. They focus on the complete range of activities and military empowerment of Iran and also this fact that Iran has an increasing role outside the Persian Gulf in Middle East region; and this is considered as an increasing threat by the US and many of its allies.

American programmers focus on the fact that Iran has gradually started a competition with the US in an international basis. Iran’s measures include a wide range of procedures from interference in the internal affairs of Morocco to anti-American propaganda and political unity with Chavez’s regime in Venezuela. At the same time American policy makers and the programmers repeatedly point out that Iran is considered as an asymmetric threat in the Persian Gulf for all its neighbors and Iran could be a threat resulting in a crisis in export of oil of the Persian Gulf and the world oil markets. Right now for dealing with these threats the US has made an alliance with Persian Gulf littoral states and has turned toward Jordan and Egypt for reaching methods to restrain Iran and limit its abilities in creating a security threat in Iraq.

American policy makers and programmers feel that nuclear weapon and missile empowerment of Iran threatens the whole Persian Gulf, many other governments in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey. American policy makers consider the Iranian missiles as a potential threat against the Europe in every challenge Iran has against the military measures of the US; they have also pointed out that Iran not only threatens Israel but it also threatens Arabs’ and Israel’s peace and the US knows that Iran is against negotiations with Arabs’ and Israel’s peace and probably it is not willing to accept a peace solution between Arabs and Israel.

Both Bush and Obama and some senior military/non-military authorities of the US have pointed out that the US has developed the military options for damaging the nuclear and missile programs of Iran. The US leaders also have stated that military competition is not considered as a situation that inevitably results in war and they do not approve using military options.

American policy makers and also most Europeans currently have this perception that using options such as sanctions and negotiations and also by focusing on diplomatic options it is possible to resist the Iran’s threat; however the American leaders have stated that military options are still on the table. Key military leaders of the US such as General Mullen, General Petraeus, and General Dempsey have stated that they are against any attack of Israel to Iran in the near future and these kinds of measures destabilize the US while it is confronting issues in Iraq and Afghanistan and also with Islamic extremists.

B) Perceptions of Iran

Iranian policy makers and programmers consider the US as the main threat against Iran and they claim that the US is the biggest threat and after that Israel are the biggest threats against the whole region. However, their personal perspectives maybe different and varied and that Iran uses the threat caused by the US and Israel as a justification for military improvement with the aim of increasing influence against the Arab neighbors and Turkey; but key Iranian officers and leaders
have described their military competition with the US as the base of efforts for increasing the military power.

Positions and comments of the military and non-military leaders of Iran show that Iran perceives itself as an important power in Persian Gulf as the natural regional leader and as a government with special historical and religious mission having historical and religious justification for its measures. These comments and positions show that Iran considers the US and regional allies of the US as the main threat against what the Iranian leaders and officers consider as Iran’s right for emergence as the government dominating the Persian Gulf.

Military trainings and establishment of Iranian forces also indicate that the military presence of the US in the Persian Gulf is hostile and unacceptable. Iran’s focus on the asymmetric doctrine in its military strategies indicates that this country considers who as the main threat of the regional influence and its national security. United States Fifth Fleet and the US military bases in the Persian Gulf; it has been Iran’s reaction to the strict strength of the US in the region, development of asymmetric empowerment focusing on encountering with the US forces and at the same time preventing from battle frontier and proving the ability of closing the Persian Gulf for preventing from oil vessels traffic in the Persian Gulf.

Iran's ballistic missile arsenal is another aspect of perceptions of Iran’s threat; because it strengths another dimension of Iran’s asymmetric response to the presence of the US in the region. Iran’s military authorities mostly clearly talk about the Iran’s ability to attack Israel and American bases in the Persian Gulf using a wide range of missiles.

Also Iran’s perception of the US is mostly negative and oppositional but Iran’s security approach against the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf has been varied after the end of Iran-Iraq war in 1988 up to 2010 and Iran usually states friendly sayings referring to concepts of Islamic brotherhood and regional solidarity; however, Iranian authorities have stated compromising statements about their neighbors in the Persian Gulf but they don’t usually consider them as equal parties. This tendency reveals the regional ambitions of Iran and Iran’s perceptions regarding its neighbors in the Persian Gulf.

In this regard, since the end of 2011 Iran has gradually talked about blocking the Persian Gulf and has stated more direct threats in a way that later it was revealed that Iran has been implementing a terror plot against the ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the US on Oct. 2011.

C) Perceptions of Arabs and Turkey

Each aspect of military competition between Iran and the US also involves a wide range of other players. Generally due to the links of the US with the governments of the southern Persian Gulf, Turkey, other Arab governments and Israel, it favors the Washington. However, Iran has made an unofficial military alliance with Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon and right now it actively competes with the US for having military influence in Iraq.
The governments of the southern Persian Gulf, most of other countries of Arab world, and some of the regional powers consider Iran as a potential or actual threat. These perceptions are different based on risk, priority and the possibility and based on changes of the behavior of Iran; the military forces of Iran and its nuclear empowerment fluctuate.

There are also more differences inside some countries among the leaders and security elites’ perceptions in one hand and the perceptions of people and media on the other hand; but what is more determinative, especially after the recent political outbursts in the Arab world, is the perceptions of national intelligence service, military programmers and high rank decision makers that usually form the national policies. They consider Iran as a threat and the US as an allied country.

In the past, although mentioning in private meetings, the Arabs used to have a conservative policy toward pointing out that Iran is a threat; but currently many leaders of the Persian Gulf and military authorities and their information experts consider Iran as a threat constantly strengthening. Leaders of Arab countries of the Persian Gulf not only consider the missile and nuclear empowerment of Iran as a threat but also more sensitive that the US regarding the asymmetric threats of Iran toward the oil export.

These concerns became more transparent in 2011. US leaders and leaders of Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and military authorities and their information experts have mutual concerns regarding the increasing ability of Iran in using expert asymmetric forces such as Quds forces and key elements of Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. Bahrain crises have increased the Arabs’ concerns and many in the Persian Gulf believe that Iran has supported the Houthi rebels in Yemen and is trying to have dominance on Iraq. US attempt to discover and expose the plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in America which has a link with Iranian power force on Oct. 2011 has intensified these concerns. This situation intensifies the problems of each and every Arab country of the Persian Gulf that has majority of Shiites and additionally, it intensifies the risk of tension between Shiites and Sunnis all around the Islamic world.

**Perceptions about the War of Sanctions**

Eventually we cannot separate the perceptions of threat by the US, Europe, Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, Turkey, Israel, Russia, China and other countries from war of sanctions between Iran and the US and diplomatic invasion of Iran in the UN-all around the world-for dealing with sanctions and attracting the satisfaction of other countries regarding the nuclear program. This conflict includes the Iran’s efforts for using this energy and other investment opportunities for accompanying Russia and China and importing advanced weaponry from both countries. Although Israel, the US and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf perceive that selling weaponry and transferring technology to Iran is destabilizing, all of them consider these sales and transfers as a threat.
Key Uncertainties in Evaluating the Details of Military Competition of Iran and the US

Estimations and perceptions regarding the data related to the conventional forces and Iran’s empowerment regarding the asymmetric war are somehow accurate, but this level of accuracy only affects the estimations about the size of forces and the number of weaponry and people and the intentions of Iran about improving these forces are unclear; also the intentions of Iran in using them are the same. At the time of threat Iran usually uses radical rhetoric such as imposing force.

A) Uncertainties Affecting the Nuclear and Missile Programs

Many of the aspects of nuclear and missile programs of Iran are unclear and experts inevitably have to guess about this matter. These uncertainties include: uncertainty about Iran’s efforts for gaining nuclear weapon, uncertainty about the accurate time for Iran to reach this empowerment and Iran’s ability in establishing this weaponry on warhead, uncertainty about the number of Iran’s nuclear facilities, uncertainty about the level of progress of centrifuges, uncertainty about the size and nature of Iran’s plans for establishing a force armed with nuclear weapon, uncertainty about the role of fighters and types of missiles, uncertainty about the method of establishing such force, uncertainty about the commanding systems, communications, computer and supervising Iran.

B) Uncertainties Affecting the Stability of the System and the Change of System

There is no consensus among the European, American, Israeli and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf regarding the political instability level of Iran that to what extent the change of system is close and how does the change of system affect the Iran’s threat. Thus the experts and decision makers in the US and Israel and also the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and other countries such as Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia all have perspectives that perceive Iran’s threat in many different ways.

C) Uncertainties Affecting the National Authorities’, military officers’ and espionage experts’ Perspectives

There is no certainty about perceiving this matter that to what extent the perspectives of authorities and espionage experts of the US, Europe, Israel and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf are actually different from each other; because many details of these perspectives are delicate and classified and the perspectives of some other actors are repeatedly changing and it is clear that there is no unique perspective about Iran’s threat.

Competition in Conventional Military Forces

Figures and data regarding the conventional forces and weaponry systems are clear and obvious. Competition in conventional forces favored the US, its friends and regional allies.
But it must be noted that if Iran manage to realize the threat of promoting the nuclear risk or a nuclear crisis or if the conventional and asymmetric force of Iran unite, using this benefit will become more difficult for the US.

Figures show that Iran’s conventional empowerment is limited compared to the conventional empowerment of the governments of near the south of Persian Gulf and quantitative measuring of the level of forces the US will establish in a specific time, the empowerment of Iran will even lessen more.

Yet this combination of weaknesses and strengths of Iran and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf also lead to facing the US with ten years in which the US must compete with Iran through keeping its conventional forces in the Persian Gulf in order to prevent from Iran’s threats against the Persian Gulf district such as missiles, weapons of mass destruction, symmetric and asymmetric forces.

Additionally, the US must focus on improving its military forces of the countries of near the Persian Gulf that are faced with the same threats.

Competition in Asymmetric forces:
All procedures related to competition in conventional forces show why Iran tries to compensate its disability in modernizing conventional forces, delays in efforts related to producing military equipment, limits regarding improving its different military forces by improving symmetric or asymmetric forces.

This effort has led to using equipment and other military technologies for motivating conventional forces to use the weaknesses of American conventional forces, US allies and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.

Moreover, these Iranian asymmetric forces have placed the ground, aerial, missile and marine empowerment of Iran in Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. These forces include: few unrecognizable people who have special skills in asymmetric missile and mining wars in the Persian Gulf; extremists and hostile people in other countries, and long-range missile forces under the control of Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution that could attack any aim in the Persian Gulf. Any use of these forces have effects lesser than using the nuclear equipment by Iran; events such as threatening Iran of shutting down the Strait of Hormuz have shown that Iran repeatedly create increasing threats. Iran has done more threats as a reaction to the US and the EU toward intensifying the economic sanctions; however these threats and even actions are less stimulating than the missile or nuclear attacks and are more probable. This situation makes the military competition, providing the security of global energy export and the global economic stability sensitive and determining for the Arab governments of the Persian Gulf.

It could be said that Iran has developed a combination of ground, aerial and marine empowerment that could threat its neighbors, could challenge the US and could affect other parts of the Middle East and Asia. Iran will also be able to use the governmental and non-governmental
actioners as figureheads for threatening its neighbors. These governmental and non-governmental forces are considered as the key elements of Iran’s strategic competition and their size and empowerment increase every day.

Closing the Persian Gulf: Iran’s military options for asymmetric war in the real world:
Iran’s recent threats related to closing the Persian Gulf is a tangible sample showing that Iran Has the capability of asymmetric war. In the late 20122 and 2012, Iran has conducted military exercises to prove its capability to close the Strait of Hormuz and to show threatening reaction regarding the presence of America's Fifth Fleet; right now the Islamic Consultative Assembly is also surveying a bill inhibiting the presence of foreign military ships in the Persian Gulf without obtaining a license from Iran’s navy.

Meanwhile, the US and the EU also have imposed more severe sanctions against Iran that may lead to threats for the Iran’s economy. Israel has been accused of terrorizing Iran’s nuclear scientists and possibly conducting sabotage in the nuclear and missile sites. Iran has been accused of a terror plot against the ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the US and bombing the Israeli diplomats’ crossings. There was a power conflict over Syria and its future between Iran supporting Assad and Arab world supporting his resignation. Iran and the US were also competing over having influence in Iraq. So a new round of visible discussions over the possibility of Israel attacking Iran for preventing Iran from reaching nuclear weapon was created. This situation indicates the complexity and increasing severity of competition between Iran and the US and the effective role of asymmetric forces in it. Iran’s asymmetric forces have shown their will in attacking the US, Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and the Europe’s benefits; a visible example of this is closing the Strait of Hormuz.

Regarding the US, policies claiming that the US could eliminate its strategic dependence on importing energy, hide these facts but in action, this claim is a set of aims and claims resulted from political intentions that have been existed since the presidency of Nixon. Recent efforts of Bush and Obama governments have no difference with the efforts of their predecessors; they also have no short-term or mid-term prospect for having more effectiveness on Iran and they also do nothing for reducing the US needs to strategic commitments for imposing deterrent and restraining Iran and other threats against the Persian Gulf.

Currently, the Strait of Hormuz has turned into a symbol of US and the world need to export energy; but there is a fact that this strait is only one of the main centers affecting the oil export. On the other hand, Iran could threat the energy trend in many areas of the Persian Gulf and outside the Strait of Hormuz; yet, emphasis on Strait of Hormuz creates a kind of mental pressure for the US.

However, this military competition between Iran and the US in the Persian Gulf determines why the senior American, Israeli, European and Arab policy makers have this mutual perception that global economy is basically depended on permanent exportation of the Persian Gulf oil. Demand for energy dependence has not a significant effect on US threat perceptions or projects for
defending the Persian Gulf. Actually, the US national security planners accept this fact that Persian Gulf is a place that have and will have a pivotal role in providing the world’s oil.

Requirements of military competition of Iran and the US on US policies

It is clear that despite the conventional dominance of the US and its allies, Iran’s symmetric strategy has created considerable challenges for American policy makers and policy makers of Arab countries near the Persian Gulf and other regional powers. Iran gradually links the asymmetric forces to new applications of its conventional forces and improves its nuclear and missile capabilities in order to react to the attacks against its asymmetric forces. Although it is unclear that to what extent the military equipment of Iran is effective at war, Iran tries to improve its forces in the region to prevent from any attacks. Iran has stated that in a serious confrontation with the US, US has an advantage but in a limited war of attrition, Iran’s equipment could create severe damages for the American forces and its allies and it could damage its infrastructure and disrupt the commerce in the Persian Gulf.

If the US wants to counteract this complicated combination of threats in different levels and different methods, it must keep its forces in the Persian Gulf to contain or even cope with Iran. If a collision happens, it must limit the war to soar; the US must convince its European allies and other governments that want to prevent from war to participate in a war against Iran and if they feel that the US acts forthright it cannot manage to attract their support. AT the same time, the US must be that powerful to be able to use its army and aerial forces for destroying the symmetric and asymmetric capabilities, providing security in Iraq and protecting its Arab allies.

The US must cooperate with Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and other Arab governments in order to improve their inhibitive and defensive capabilities. The US must have close cooperation with allies such as France and Britain and must be after attracting the cooperation of key allies such as Turkey. In a more technical level, the US must equip, modernize and train the military forces of the allies in the area.

The US must have full preparation against coping with a wide range of military options made by Iran. Relations of Iran with Hamas, Hezbollah, supporters of Sadr and other Shiite militia in Iraq, Syria and Shiite majorities in other Arab countries of the Persian Gulf create relations in which they are capable of using the governmental and non-governmental actioners in asymmetric war. Right now Iran has used these weapons against Israel for decreasing the internal stability and solidarity of the US in the Middle East for an indirect attack against American forces in Iraq and helping Hamas to have the power in Gaza.

Generally, the US must consider this fact that as long as the current regime in Iran has the power, there will be a military competition between Iran and the US; the Strait of Hormuz will keep its strategic importance and Iran will try to improve its position as a regional power and Iran will repeatedly try to challenge the presence of the US in the Middle East. Based on this, the US must
consider Iran’s perception regarding the military competition and also conventional and asymmetric capabilities and also must develop its equipment to cope with Iran’s evolving equipment.
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