

GEOPOLITICS OF THE PERSIAN GULF REGION

Bartosz Bojarczyk

The Department of International Relationships, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin
Plac Litewski 3, 20-080 Lublin, boyar@o2.pl

Abstract. The Persian Gulf region is one of the most important to the world's energy security system. Vast amounts of energy resources make the region very valuable to the world powers who seek to establish a longstanding presence there to safeguard their basic interest. Besides the energy factor, the Persian Gulf has a very fragile security system. The differences and diverse interests between regional states as well as the constant presence of US forces complicate the nature and structure of its security system. The main aim of this article is to analyze the most important variables that shape the Persian Gulf security system by focusing on the geopolitical characteristics of the states and the Persian Gulf itself. A second goal is to present the evolution of the security system of the region in last decades.

Key words: Persian Gulf, geopolitics, security, United States policy, regional rivalry, energy issues, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The Persian Gulf is one of the most important regions in the world. Vast reservoirs of energy resources, the longstanding stabilization process of Iraq, conflict over Iranian nuclear program, constant and active penetration by outside powers, mainly the US, as well as turmoil in some sheikdoms make it quite fragile and unstable. Many scholars believe that Persian Gulf region is a unique geopolitical region in today's world¹. There have been gradually shift in the Middle East over the years. For many decades the "core" international interest related to the Arab/Palestinian – Israeli conflict, but the significance of the Persian Gulf increased to the level of one of the "hottest" spots in the international system since the beginning of the 1970s. Security in the region includes hard military issues but also a lot of soft issues related mainly to the internal politics of littoral states and the multilevel interactions between them². On one hand we may see growing conflict over the Iranian nuclear program, the threat of the next arms race among Persian Gulf states, growing penetration of outside powers

¹ P. Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Security and Territoriality in the Persian Gulf. A Maritime Political Geography*, Curzon Press, 1999, p. 9.

² *Security in the Persian Gulf. Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus*, L.G. Potter, G.G. Sick (ed.), Palgrave 2002, p. 1–2.

(especially the United States), etc. On the other, the region has been lately destabilized by growing tensions arising from ethnical, cultural and religious differences and by economic fluctuations of those states' economies.

The main aim of this article is to analyze the most serious/influential variables that shape Persian Gulf security system with a focus on geopolitical characteristics of the states and the Persian Gulf itself. Later in the article, the evolution of the security system of the region in last decades will be presented. The most prominent or rather most emphasized factor of regional geopolitics is the presence of vast amounts of energy resources (oil, gas) in the region, but most of scholars agree that analyzing only the oil and gas factors would be a simplification and result in incorrect conclusions. Persian Gulf relations are not only about energy resources. The security complex is much wider and we need to look into the broad list of issues to understand the system as a whole.

REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Persian Gulf stretches from the Gulf of Oman on the south to the marshes of the Shatt-al Arab River on the north. It is a "closed" basin with the Strait of Hormuz as its only connection with open seas (the Sea of Oman). The Gulf's length is about 865 kilometers and 370 kilometers wide at its widest point. It fills about 235.000 square kilometers and its depth is never more than 92 meters³. The geopolitical location sets it as a bridge between Africa, Europe and Asia, a vital cross point in the global system, something what was quickly recognized by European powers and later by the United States. As a part of Middle East, the Persian Gulf region forms a unique geopolitical model⁴. The member states of the region are Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Umm al Quawim, Ras al Khaimah) and Oman. Such a geopolitical structure is formed on the basis of cultural mixture. Almost three thousand years of history makes the region one of the oldest and most important in the world. Yemen also plays an important role in the Persian Gulf system and affects relations in the region, a result of its long civil war, Shia-Sunni conflict and more recently the Iranian-Saudi confrontation. However, other factors like geographical distance, permanent internal turmoil and lack of energy resources exclude Yemen from the main understanding of Persian Gulf region.

³ D.E. Long, *The Persian Gulf. An Introduction to Its People, Politics and Economics*, Westview Press, revised edition, 1978, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18-19.

Table 1. Persian Gulf population – selected data

	Population total 2010 ¹	Shia as % of total population 2009 ²	Migrants as % of total population 2010 ³
Bahrain	1 107	65–75	25
Iran	74 733	90–95	2.9
Iraq	32 046	65–70	0.3
Kuwait	3 582	20–25	76.7
Oman	2 981	5–10	29.7
Qatar	1 700	~10	74.2
Saudi Arabia	21 393	10–15	26.5
UAE	5 218	~10	43.8

Source:

¹ World Economic Outlook Database, April 2012, International Monetary Fund, <http://www.imf.org/-external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?>

² Mapping the Global Muslim Population. A report on the size and Distribution of the world's Muslim population, October 2009, PewResearchCenter, http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/Muslimpopulation.pdf, p. 10.

³ World Development Indicators and Global Development Finance, The World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org/Data/Views/VariableSelection/SelectVariables.aspx?source=World%20Development%20Indicators%20and%20Global%20Development%20Finance>.

The most populous state is Iran, where half of the regional population lives, but what concerns its western neighbors is its economic and military potential. The Iranian-Iraqi-Saudi triangle is considered as main area of cooperation and rivalry. Those states play dominant roles in shaping the security of the region⁵. The small sheikdoms have small populations and have historically looked to bigger regional or foreign powers for the security.

The Persian Gulf's ethnic, cultural and religious structure is deeply divided. The most obvious gap is between Shia and Persian Iran and Arab Sunni states, something that frequently destabilized the region. The main Shia-Sunni rivalry lies in the Saudi-Iranian relations. Besides Iran, Shia people dominate in Iraq and Bahrain. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 resulted in creation of a theocratic Shia Iran and its aggressive revolutionary approach to the Persian Gulf has brought the issue of religious diversity to the dominant level of regional affairs once again. Intersectarian war that took place in recent years in Iraq created fears about the possibility of a total outbreak of Sunni-Shia conflict. That dimension has often shaped the relations between the member states and still is considered a main securitization issue. The case of Bahrain, where economic and political demands are being violently put down by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni monarchies, is also connected to the religious division of the population. The religious division exists and is often used as leverage to put pressure on governments like on Bahrain or Iraq. Also,

⁵ M. Vaezi, *Role of Iraq and Neighbors in the Security of the Persian Gulf*, "Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs", Vol. 1, No. 2, 2010, p. 22.

Saudi Arabia conducts an incoherent policy towards its Shia minority, being unsure about its loyalty towards the Saudi monarchy. The Persian Gulf is a unique spot in the Islam world, because the Shia population is so well represented in traditional Sunni Muslim societies. Despite many attempts made on both sides, this division still shapes relations in the region and sectarian identity remains an important factor in the social and political context.

The other important issue related to the population structure is dependence on a foreign labor force. As presented in Table 1, the conservative monarchies are dangerously reliant on expatriate workers: over 75% of the population in Kuwait and Qatar is foreign. Such a situation creates a lot of political, economic and humanitarian problems in these states and is considered one of their major socio-economic challenges. Such a huge contingent of hired force results from a largely unproductive national labor force unwilling to take some basic/low prestige positions⁶ and the economic capability to pay for it. Foreign labor influences the security of the lower Persian Gulf states not only on an economic and political level but also by contributing to changes in the cultural and social character of their societies⁷.

Table 2. Persian Gulf states – population structure

	Population ages 0–14 % of total		Population ages 15–64 % of total		Population ages > 65 % of total	
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010
Bahrain	26	20	72	78	2	2
Iran	25	23	70	72	5	5
Iraq	44	43	53	54	3	3
Kuwait	25	27	72	71	3	2
Oman	31	27	66	70	3	3
Qatar	19	13	80	86	1	1
Saudi Arabia	33	30	64	67	3	3
UAE	19	17	81	83	< 1	< 1

Source: World Development Indicators and Global Development Finance, The World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org/Data/Views/VariableSelection/SelectVariables.aspx?source=World%20Development%20Indicators%20and%20Global%20Development%20Finance>.

All regional states are facing similar problems with increasing population, especially in the size of the active labor force. The demographic boom resulted from better health conditions and changes in the style of life provided by oil

⁶ J.A. Kechichian, *Power and Succession in Arab Monarchies. A Reference Guide*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008, pp. 416–417.

⁷ For further analysis on impact of migrant labor force in the Persian Gulf states look for ex.: A. Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian migrant workers in the GCC countries*, UN/POP/EGM/2006/02, 2006, http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM_Ittmig_Arab/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf.

money revenues and has resulted in deep socio-economic challenges. The governments struggle to provide education, social and medical care as well as jobs to the growing group of active young population. This is big financial task and only thanks to oil revenues can they continue to stabilize the economic situation. The issue of growing populations, especially in the Lower Persian Gulf States, is one the most critical concerns. The monarchies need to implement some economic and social programs and reorganize their national economies in the way as to absorb so many young and active people. The case of Saudi Arabia is very good example of the problem, because its public sector employs over 80 percent of the labor force⁸. The Saudis prefer to take government jobs, because of better salary and prestige and they don't want to occupy so called dirty jobs. That creates a problem of over employment, where states and companies create job positions only for employment issues. At the same time Saudi Arabia invites foreign workers that count for a quarter of population of that state. This creates a situation that Saudis do not have jobs and are reluctant to occupy some positions, so the government has to rely more and more on expatriates coming to Saudi Arabia mainly from Asian and other Middle East states.

Table 3. Unemployment rate in the Persian Gulf states

	Unemployment rate adults (15+)	
	Male	Female
Bahrain (2004)	5.6	20
Iran (2008)	9.1	16.8
Iraq (2006)	16.2	22.5
Kuwait (2005)	2.0	1.8
Oman	-	-
Qatar (2007)	0.2	2.6
Saudi Arabia (2009)	3.5	15.9
UAE (2008)	2.0	12

Source: United Nations Demographic and Social Statistics, Social Indicators, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/>.

The data in Table 3 comes from the United Nations social statistics documents, but we have to look on it with some distrust. The data were provided to the United Nations by the governments or is taken from other institutions. Persian Gulf states are not so eager to share basic indicators and many times they falsify them for the better picture. Also the data in the table shows only the unemployment among citizens, excluding, for example, three quarters of Kuwait's population. It is a popular view that issues related to the job markets and economic developments of Persian Gulf states are most important from the point of view of internal stability and prosperity. It seems that one of the main challenges for

⁸ M. Yamani, *The New Generation in Saudi Arabia: Cultural Change, Political Identity, and Regime Security*, in: *Security in the Persian Gulf*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

those governments is to build up national economies and create life opportunities for huge numbers of youth, while at the same time going away from dependency on oil the sector.

It seems that the economic issues are essential to the security of the region. The Persian Gulf is the spot, where all of the states are dependent on rather addicted to oil and gas revenues. The other sectors of the economies are underdeveloped, which results in serious threats to the security of those countries. Any challenges to production or export of energy resources may lead to the destabilization of most of those states. The good example of such theory is Iran, which suffers from international and US sanctions related on the energy resources sector. The active nuclear program and especially uranium enrichment program have brought sanctions on Iran and successfully undermine the regime's efforts strains to stabilize the economic situation. Iran is in economic crisis, with unemployment and inflation ratio growing to the dangerous levels and basic life of citizens has become very harsh. The other example may be the case of Bahrain and Oman, who received enormous financial help from the GCC states to stabilize their socio-political situation. In the wake of the Arab spring and the Arab intervention in Bahrain⁹, the conservative monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council agreed on March 2011 to help Bahrain and Oman with \$10 billion each¹⁰. It shows that regional Arab states are ready to act on different levels (political, military, and financial) to preserve the stability of Sunni monarchies and the status quo of regional system. The instability of Bahrain rose to the level of regional concern and Saudi Arabia put on the table idea of union with that state in 2011. The plan met with sharp Iranian objection and Bahrainis confusion in not likely to materialize in the near future¹¹.

The next geopolitical factor to be presented is military potency of regional states and the shape of the "hard" security system. The Persian Gulf region is one of the most militarized regions in today's world. The rivalry between regional states, especially Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, as well as constant presence of big US forces makes the region an area of military confrontation. The region went through many military conflicts in the last thirty years: Iran-Iraq war (1980–1981), the Kuwait annexation and Operation Desert Storm (1991), the military containment of Iraq during the 1990s, the war with Saddam Hussein regime and long stabilization mission or rather civil war in Iraq (2003–2011). The military balance in the Persian Gulf is very fragile, based on United States

⁹ W. Butler, *Saudi Arabian intervention in Bahrain driven by visceral Sunni fear of Shias*, "The Observer", 20 March 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/20/bahrain-saudi-arabia-rebellion>.

¹⁰ "Khaleej Times", 11 March 2011, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle09.asp?xfile=data/business/2011/March/business_March213.xml§ion=business.

¹¹ "Teheran Times", 15th May 2012, <http://tehrantimes.com/middle-east/97913-no-decision-on-saudi-bahrain-union->.

military buildup and its diplomatic efforts to bind all of the regional states, except Iran, into one security system, pro American in its core.

Table 4. Size of Persian Gulf states military forces and value of defense budgets

	Active military forces	Defence Budget 2010 (in US \$)
Bahrain	8 200	747 mln
Iran	523 000	10.6 bn
Iraq	271 400	4.19 bn
Kuwait	15 500	3.91 bn
Oman	42 600	4.18 bn
Qatar	11 800	3.12 bn*
Saudi Arabia	233 500	45.2 bn*
UAE	51 000	8.65 bn

*In term of Qatar the value represents total military expenditures in 2010.

*For Saudi Arabia the value represents defense and security budget.

Source: The Military Balance 2012, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge 2012, pp. 318–352.

As previously stated, three countries dominate in the size of military forces. Iran possesses a little less military personnel than the other littoral states. However, its military power is rather defensive and except for advanced ballistic missile program, it is not likely that Tehran could conduct any offensive operation towards the Persian Gulf states in the longer perspective. Saudi Arabia, thanks to longstanding military alliance with the USA, is capable defending itself and has regional ambitions to lead the other sheikdoms. Iraq used to play a significant military role in the region but in 1991 most of its potency at this field was eliminated by international forces and later by the US-led coalition. From the “hard” security point of view, regional affairs are divided into two groups: Iran and the rest of the states that preserve much closer security relations with Washington. That the main challenge to the regional affairs. All of the objective determinants state power predestine Iran to the role of regional leader. However, ideological or systemic conflict with the United States prevents. Tehran from being recognized as a one. Arab regional states are also rather suspicious about Iranian ambitions and prefer to counterbalance it through close ties with USA¹². Iranian efforts to develop nuclear program, or as it is widely believed a nuclear bomb, are perceived by Western powers as a main threat to the Middle East and global security systems.

The other variable of regional affairs is the high level of militarization. The military affairs of the Persian Gulf have been described and analyzed in detail in recent years by A. H. Cordesman and its colleagues from Center for Strategic

¹² A.K. Alshayji, *Mutual Realities, Perceptions, and Impediment Between The GCC States and Iran*, in: *Security in the Persian Gulf*, *op. cit.*, pp. 224–225.

and International Studies¹³. ALL of the littoral states are trying to build up their military potencies to safeguard themselves from the other regional actors and international powers. Persian Gulf states are spending vast amounts of oil money on arm purchases. Lately, Washington announce the \$30 billion arms transfer of air jets to Saudi Arabia and was negotiating a several million dollar contract with Iraq¹⁴. Other Arab monarchies are also trying to build up national forces by buying foreign equipment and relying on foreign well-paid personnel. Those tiny states, especially Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, purchase huge amounts of sophisticated armaments mainly from the USA and other Western powers¹⁵. For many observers such purchases do not result in increasing real security of the states, they do serve as a link with the Western world and create the subjectivefeeling of security.

Table 5. Persian Gulf States – value of total conventional weapons imports 2006–2010
(in US \$ millions)

	Total	USA	UK	Russia
Bahrain	195	98	60	-
Iran	1 119	-	-	773
Iraq	1 811	1 145	5	257
Kuwait	377	302	1	36
Oman	479	339	-	-
Qatar	311	280	-	-
Saudi Arabia	2 602	1 126	1038	-
UAE	4 919	2 715	-	427

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armtransfers/>, 25.05.2012.

The United States is the main arms supplier to the all regional states but Iran. It gives Washington a privileged position and makes it able to control military developments of its regional allies. It seems that all of them are dependent on American know-how and technologies as well as technical and training support. The case of Iran is very different. Because of its confrontational position towards USA and other Western powers, Iran had no other option to look into USSR and mainly Russia for military technologies and products. Due to the economic, technology and financial sanctions, Tehran was also forced into a massive buildup of its domestic arms industry. Advanced ballistic missile and nuclear programs are the best examples of Iranian determination to rely on its own capabilities in

¹³ Iran and the Gulf Military Balance: Parts I and II: new ninth edition, <http://csis.org/publication/iran-and-gulf-military-balance-1>

¹⁴ *U.S. Agrees to \$30 Billion Arms Deal*, “The New York Times”, December 29 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/30/world/middleeast/with-30-billion-arms-deal-united-states-bolsters-ties-to-saudi-arabia.html>.

¹⁵ J. Warrick, *U.S. steps up arms sales to Persian Gulf allies*, “The Washington Post”, 31.01.2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/30/AR2010013001477.html>.

safeguarding the hard security of the state. The structure of the military system of the Persian Gulf is rather easy to read. The United States and Iran are main foes. In addition to that confrontation line, we may draw a parallel one between Iran and Arab regional states. That animosity is deeply historically rooted and is still seen as one of the main security issues. The military competitive triangle was traditionally shaped by Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the constant presence of one of global powers – Great Britain and later USA, USSR/Russia and others. Currently the United States is perceived as a dominant power that controls and secures the region from imminent threats and many scholars use the term *Pax Americana* to describe the shape of regional affairs. Iranian Islamic Republic has tried to confront the American position for many years but rather unsuccessfully. Recently, Iran was able to normalize or even to establish friendly relations with Iraq and informally gained a lot of influence on the politics and policies there. Washington disapproves of those relations but has no means to limit them. Anyhow, the military relations of the Persian Gulf are overshadowed by the US military presence, security agreements between Washington and regional states and independent or confrontational policies of the Islamic regime in Tehran.

The next analyzed variable of the region's position is hydrocarbons. The vast reserves of oil and natural gas make the Persian Gulf very valuable and substantial for global security system. 65% of the world's proven oil reserves and 44% of proven gas reserves are located in the region¹⁶. Sustained production and the free flow of energy resources from the Persian Gulf are vital to principal stage and developments of international economy. Any turmoil in the area results in dramatic decrease of energy resources with deep global repercussions that touch the daily life of everyman. On the other hand, money from hydrocarbons' sales made those states reliant on them and challenges the development of strong economies. A widely accepted view is that Persian Gulf states are totally dependent on oil and gas revenues, something that what makes them very vulnerable to the global trends and economic changes.

Saudi Arabia has a leading role in production and export, but the other states' production is also crucial for the global system. In recent years a few developments took place in the regional oil market. First, due to the international sanctions of 2011/12, Iran's traditional energy partners have started to replace the oil shipments from Iran with other sources. The last set of sanctions, which formally put embargo on Iranian oil, has already started to work. Since July 2012, European Union states (mainly Italy, Greece, Spain) have banned any oil imports from Iran and the rest of its costumers (mostly from Asia) promised to cut their purchases by 20 percent. It is predicted that Iranian oil exports (in 2011 about 2.5 mln b/d) will be reduced significantly and would stabilize between

¹⁶ OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2010/2011, OPEC, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2010_2011.pdf

Table 6. Persian Gulf states – oil indicators (2010)

	Oil proven reserves (mln/b)	Daily oil production (1000b/d)	Exports of crude oil (1000 b/d)	Exports of crude oil and petroleum products (1000b/d)
Bahrain	na	180.2	na	230.6
Iran	151 170	3 544.0	2 583	2 953.6
Iraq	143 100	2 358.1	1 890	1 895.5
Kuwait	101 500	2 312.1	1 430	2 061.2
Oman	5 500	758.3	745	745.0
Qatar	25 382	733.4	586	908.1
Saudi Arabia	264 516	8 165.6	6 644	7 594.9
UAE	97 800	2 323.8	2 103	2 291.1

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2010/2011, OPEC, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2010_2011.pdf

1.2–1.8 mln b/d¹⁷. This will certainly leverage Iran's international position and create a lot of instability there, maybe even violent clashes and will certainly harden its regional policies, especially those directed towards the USA and its allies. Secondly, growing Iraqi oil production and transport capabilities may soon be enough to stabilize market after losses connected to the embargo on Iran. Thanks to the investments of international companies, Iraq increased its oil exports to almost 2.5 mln b/d in 2012 and has ambitious plans to reach 10 mln b/d production by 2017¹⁸. It is unlikely that Iraq will reach that goal but the production of 5–10 mln b/d increases its position significantly and allows it to obtain needed funds for reconstruction and development programs. It looks like Iraq may have replaced Iranian oil supplies, something that would allow more flexibility for US policy and a possible military strike on Tehran.

While the region serves as a vital reservoir of oil for the global economy, the situation with respect to natural gas the situation looks very different. While the Persian Gulf states, mainly Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, own 44% of natural gas world reserves, their contributions to the international amount to only 13% of world natural gas exports¹⁹. For decades the natural gas industries of the region were underdeveloped, a result of the big demand for oil. In last few decades the trends have changed, and most of these states started to invest in natural gas sectors. The best example is Qatar, who since late 1980s has built up its natural gas sector almost from ashes and become one of the fastest developing gas sup-

¹⁷ K. Katzman, *Iran Sanctions*, Congressional Research Service, RS20871, July 16 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf>, p. 40.

¹⁸ T. Arango, C. Krauss, *Oil Output Soars as Iraq Retools, Easing Shaky Markets*, "The New York Times", June 2 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/world/middleeast/crude-oil-output-is-soaring-in-iraq-easing-markets.html?_r=1.

¹⁹ OPEC Annual..., *op. cit.*

Table 7. Persian Gulf states – natural gas indicators (2010)

State	Gas proven reserves mld m ³	Gross production of natural gas mln m ³	Natural gas exports mln m ³ /year	Natural gas imports mln m ³ /year
Bahrain	na	na	na	na
Iran	33 090	220 124	8 429	7 243
Iraq	3 158	16 885	na	na
Kuwait	1 784	11 950	na	890
Oman	610	na	11 700	1 500
Qatar	25 201	109 335	107 000	na
Saudi Arabia	8 016	97 030	na	na
UAE	6 091	79 778	5 108	25 705

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2010/2011, OPEC, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2010_2011.pdf

pliers in the market. Iran and Saudi Arabia produce massive amounts of gas but due to the massive domestic demands are not able to export natural gas in large amounts. In case of Iran, its exports are almost equal to the those Turkmen deliveries passing through Turkey. Oman and the UAE follow Qatar and are developing their gas industries with help of transnational companies, and it looks like that they are reaching their peak level of production and export capabilities. Iran possesses the second largest gas reserves in the world and produces most of the natural gas in the region. Unfortunately, international and US sanctions prevent Iran from attracting foreign companies that would invest billions of dollars in declining hydrocarbon industries; this is why Tehran is gradually decreasing its oil exports and becoming a net importer of natural gas²⁰. It does not enough capital and lacks the technology to developed new fields to sustain current output. Growing domestic consumption decreases its net export value. Iran estimates that there is a need of over \$300 bln in foreign direct investment in near future²¹, but international agencies estimate a much bigger figure. It is also worth noting that Iran is importer of gasoline products, because of its unsatisfactory refinery capacity, making it very vulnerable to international restrictions. Natural gas is an option for the Persian Gulf states who may easily add more production and export capacity, and increase their revenues. The international market would absorb regional production increases which would contribute to the more stability and security of global system.

²⁰ S. Ilias, *Iran's Economic Conditions: U.S. Policy Issues*, Congressional Research Service, RL34525, April 22, 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34525.pdf>, p. 17.

²¹ *Iran seeking up to \$10 billion in foreign investment this year*, "Tehran Times", 15.05.2012, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/economy-and-business/97858-up-to-10-billion-of-foreign-investment-planned-this-year>.

REGIONAL PENETRATION AND US POLICY

Two issues will be analyzed in the next part of the article: evolution of regional security system and the growing involvement of the USA to its current dominant position in the region. The Persian Gulf security structure was never free of foreign penetration, or rather domination, by outside powers in modern times. It might be said that traditionally the involvement of foreign powers in the Persian Gulf was based on three fundamental motives: trade, political rivalry, and imperial security²². During the Middle Ages the Arabian Empire fell due to the Roman military confrontation, Mongol raids devastated the region and ended its former superiority, as well as internal struggles for power. The center of power shifted from the Persian Gulf area to Anatolia, where new Osmanian Sultanate was founded in the XV century. Only Persia defended its independence and retained a major position in region. Left bank of basin was now controlled by Ottomans who had succeeded in keeping the Caliphate and establishing a new Muslim Empire. Since the end of XIX century, the next defining period of Persian Gulf occurred. The growing activity of the Great Britain led to the penetration of the Lower Persian Gulf area. In XVIII and early XIX centuries Britain was able to formally subordinate territories of what are now the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and even Oman²³. Also Iran, although formally independent, became the victim of British and Russian penetration that practically made it unable to conduct any sovereign internal or external policies. By controlling foreign relations of small states and maintaining active and influential position in Persia, Great Britain established a so called *Pax Britannica* in the region, where none of regional states or outside powers were able to undermine its position²⁴. The dissolution of Ottoman Empire as a result of World War I strengthened the British position, because it established formal protectorates over Persian Gulf sheikhdoms. British policies in the region were driven to by vital interests: securing the connection with India by establishment of airfields and navy infrastructure, allowing for more expansion of British business, and maintaining the high output of cheap oil which had, already started to be an important source of energy for British economy and military power (navy)²⁵.

Between the great wars the exclusive regional, in its sense, security system has started to take shape. Iran under Reza Khan became fully sovereign and finally got rid of British penetration (earlier, Bolshevik Revolution of 1917

²² J.E. Peterson, *The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security*, in: *Security in the Persian Gulf*, op. cit., p. 7.

²³ W.T. Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, p. 13–17.

²⁴ J. Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection*, Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Occasional Paper No.4, 2009.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 13–15.

changed Soviet policy towards Iran). In 1932 Iraq was granted independence from Great Britain's League of Nation mandate and Saudi Arabia under Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud unified and was recognized internationally (Saudi's sovereignty over territories was recognized by Britain in 1927). Iraq played a role as formal loyal ally of Great Britain until 1958 and Riyadh very quickly turned to the USA for economic and later military and security assistance. As can be seen, until WWII the Persian Gulf was overwhelmed by Britain and only Iran had ambitions to conduct autonomous policies and tried to limit the British position.

World War II brought significant changes to the Persian Gulf affairs. First, during the war, foreign penetration increased in Iraq and Iran; they were occupied by allied forces who secured the rich oilfields as well as a land route connecting Allies with Soviet Union. Second, the USA became more active in the region, especially after the British decision to dissolve its Empire in 1947. Prior to the war, US treated whole Middle East with minor concern. Within a few years, the region rose to the level of strategic priority in the eyes of American administration. The United States came out of the war as a global superpower and started to replace the British as a stabilizer of the whole Middle East region. That power has relied on the relations with Saudi Arabia but in 1946 became active in so called "Iran crisis," when president Truman threatened to use a nuclear bomb against the USSR if the Soviet Army postponed its departure from Iran. It created a lot of positive feelings towards the Americans, especially in Iran, but also in other Persian Gulf territories. The US involvement into Iranian affairs reached its peak in 1953, when the CIA successfully organized a *coup d'état* (operation "Ajax"), which overthrew the democratic and nationalistic government of Dr Mossadeq and brought Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi back to full power. In addition to the Shah's thanks and the establishment of a formal friendship, American companies were granted a 40% share in the Iranian oil industry²⁶. Washington's next move to secure Western interests in the region was to persuade the most powerful Middle East states (Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey) and Great Britain to form an anti-Soviet military alliance, the Baghdad Pact, in 1955.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 showed significant differences between the major Western powers and resulted in confrontation between them. Britain and France were humiliated and forced to remove their troops from Egypt. That fact persuaded Great Britain to begin a wider withdrawal from the Middle East, staying only in the Persian Gulf sheikdoms, which were too valuable for London, because of oil resources and business linkages. British policies resulted in a bigger and more direct American role in the Middle East and in the Persian Gulf in particular. Washington had to react not only to British policies but also was surprised by Iraqi revolution of 1958, which had deep consequences for regional

²⁶ M. Ghaffari, *Political Economy of Oil in Iran*, London, BookExtra, 2000, p. 297.

security. Iraq shifted from a loyal western ally to a more balanced position towards the superpowers. Nationalistic government of General Kassim was overthrown by Baath party several years later. It pushed Baghdad into close relations with the USSR. Between 1958 and 1959, the USA organized Central Treat Organization (CENTO) by signing defense agreements with Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. The new organization was part of American global strategy of active containment of Soviet penetration.

During the 1960s, the security system of the Persian Gulf had, by some means, stabilized. Iran and Saudi Arabia were allied with the United States, Great Britain was still ruling the Sheikdoms and controlled Oman but had already started to prepare for the final withdrawal from the region. In 1961 limited independence was granted to Kuwait which paved the way, in organizational and security terms, for sovereignty of Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The Soviet Union was gaining more power over Iraq and an alliance was concluded in 1972 (Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation). The new and serious challenges to regional security system came to the surface with the 1968 British decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1972. The power vacuum would be created and it was obvious that Soviet Union would try to fill it by active or even aggressive policies in the region (as happened in case of Iraq) undermining or threatening western interests in the Persian Gulf.

The United States decided to become more active in the region but had limited capabilities in doing so. The longstanding, very bloody and costly conflict in Indochina did not allow for direct involvement of US military forces in the region. The United States decided to rely on alliances and proxy imperialism in securing the stability of the region²⁷. Under the Nixon Doctrine (announced in 1969), the USA applied the so called twin-pillar policy in the Persian Gulf. Western, and principally American, interests were to be secured by regional powers. The main advocate of American interests in the region was Iran, but Saudi Arabia, whose significance came from the world's largest oil supplies and its huge production, played a secondary role²⁸. USA made an agreement with Iran in which it promised to sell all the arms to Iran except nuclear one; to provide US advisors to train the army and conserve the weapons and to assist, together with Iran, the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq²⁹. This deal allowed the Shah to spend the enormous oil revenues on weaponry. "Between 1971 and 1977, the United States sold an amazing \$12 billion in weapons to Iran; one third of U.S.

²⁷ M.J. O'Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²⁸ M.E. Ahravi., *Iran in the Post-Cold War Persian Gulf Order*, in: *The Persian Gulf After the Cold War*, M.E. Ahravi, J.H. Noyes (ed.), Westport, Praeger, 1993, p. 82–83.

²⁹ B. Rubin, *The Persian Gulf After The Cold Was: Old Pattern, New Era*, "Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)", Vol. 3, No. 2 – June 1999, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue2/jv3n2a6.html> 1999, p. 2.

overseas military sales”³⁰. Iran during the 1970s played a role as gendarme of the Persian Gulf and was in charge of containing growing Iraqi/Soviet position in the region. Militarily advanced, having backup from the USA and ambitious to lead the region Shah Mohammad Pahlavi expected Iran to enter a group of global powers. Of course Iran’s growing aspirations were seen with concern by Arab Gulf states and with open hostility by Iraq. Most of the Arabs states were looking after the USA as their protector and Iran’s role was rather a secondary one.³¹ The Arab Gulf states were looking with suspicion on both the strongest regional players, Iran and Iraq: “(...) the conservative Persian Gulf States were also rather alarmed by the Shah’s grand design and treated his regime with as much care and caution as the Ba’athist Iraqi polity, but so long as Iran’s general orientation remaining pro-status quo they had little reason for arguing over details with him”³².

The revolution that took place in Iran between 1978 and 1979 and ultimately led to establishment of Islamic republic in Iran has completely changed relations in the Persian Gulf. Iran evolved from the strongest pillar of security system into the main threat to the regional status quo and challenged the whole idea of western-planned global system. From the most loyal ally of the USA in the region, Iran became the biggest opponent of US policies and hostage crisis³³ leveled up the relations between them almost to the point of war. Iran cancelled the 1959 defense agreement with the USA, withdrew from CENTO and entered the Non-Aligned Movement. Confrontational policies by new regime (export of revolution to the other Middle East states) and the possibility of alliance with the USSR put Washington into a very uncomfortable position. It had no other option but to react sharply and move to more assertive policies to safeguard its interests and secure the region. The American answer to the regional developments was stated on 23rd January 1980 in Carter’s doctrine, which warned that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force”³⁴. USA has organized Rapid Deployment Forces in the region and signed defense and facilities agreements with Oman to secure the free flow of oil from the Gulf. At the same time it put an embargo on military deliveries to Iran and froze all with this state. Carter Doctrine was and still is one of the most im-

³⁰ M.G. Roskin, N.O. Berry, *IR – The New World of International Relations*, Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall, 1999, fourth edition, p. 157.

³¹ B. Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³² A. Ehteshami, *Wheels Within Wheels: Iran’s Policy Towards the Arab World*, in: *Reconstruction and Regional Diplomacy in the Persian Gulf*, H. Amirahmadi, N. Entessar (ed.), London, Routledge, 1992, p. 158.

³³ Iranian students stormed and occupied US embassy in Iran (04.11.1979) and kept in hostage its personnel for 444 days.

³⁴ Cited after: M. J. O’Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

portant American doctrines in the region because its fulfillment still takes place but with some amendments. It elevated the US “domination” doctrine and by end of the 1980s it applied not only to outside powers but mainly to regional states, who wanted to drastically change the regional status quo, like Iraq or right now Iran.

Iraqi invasion on Iran of 1980 complicated regional affairs even more and brought up again the Arab-Persian confrontation. The eight year long war resulted in high militarization of regional affairs and more involvement by USA but ended in no geopolitical changes. During the war the GCC states, mainly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were strong supporters of Iraqi regime. They chose to support Iraq partly because of Iran’s activities in the region but mostly such position was caused by historical and psychological factors. Iran seemed to be a real danger while Iraq, as an Arab country, was accepted as defender of region from the revolutionary Republic. After few years this support resulted in direct action against the GCC members in the beginning of 1980s, something that was quite strange for the Arab states. Additionally, Western powers (USA) tried to prevent both sides from winning the conflict and was doing all to either fighting side from become superior. When in the mid 1980s it looked like Iran had a chance to win over Iraq, Washington decided to back Saddam Hussein with logistic, financial and even military help. The strange situation occurred when USA was informally supporting Soviet ally – Iraq, and Moscow started to reorient into closer relations with Tehran. Escalation of war, including the tanker war and internationalization of the conflict brought more turmoil to region. Washington had no option but to secure the free flow of oil from Persian Gulf, a goal that was connected with military its actions against Iran.

Iran’s attempt to win the war with Iraq had failed by 1988. Because of domestic problems, Iraqi supremacy in sophisticated weaponry (especially rockets), and involvement of the USA in the conflict, Iran agreed to accept resolution 598. In July 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini agreed to the resolution and on 20 August it took effect, ending the eight year war³⁵. The longest conflict in the modern history of the Persian Gulf did not change anything and there was no winner. Iranian efforts to spread its revolutionary ideas were stopped by the Iraqi regime, but the war helped the Islamic leader to cement the revolution and establish a solid political system. Most obvious outcomes of war were increase in hostility between regional states, economic and social devastation of Iraq and Iran, and increased reliance on American securities by conservative Arab monarchies.

The next chapter of Persian Gulf affairs was started with the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait in 1990. The Iraqi move was shocking for Arab states and stunned the US administration. USA’s growing alliance with the Iraqi regime did not project any territorial changes and President G. Bush reacted according

³⁵ H.A. Sadri, *Trends in the Foreign Policy of Revolutionary Iran*, “Journal of Third World Studies”, Vol. 15, No. 1, April 1998, p. 9.

to Carter's doctrine, fully opposed the annexation, and wanted the restoration of status quo in region. Kuwait's liberation did not wait for a long time. The coalition of Allied forces led by the USA and having full backing from the United Nations Security Council, defeated the Iraqi army, liberated Kuwait and advanced troops deep into Iraq's territory. Within two months the humiliation of Saddam was complete and the status quo restored in the Persian Gulf. After the victorious "Desert Storm", the USA together with the Persian Gulf Arab states wanted to reshape regional relations and establish a new regional security system. They proposed three security arrangements for the Persian Gulf: security guaranteed by the GCC states and some regional Arab countries, status quo relying only on the GCC, and the USA as the regional protector³⁶. Iran wanted and was actively proposing to organize the regional security system without foreign powers' involvement but finally the Arab states turned into the USA for the protection³⁷. The profound consequence of Operation Desert Storm was the direct formal political, military, and in all other means, involvement of the USA into Persian Gulf security system. Before 1990 only Saudi Arabia and Oman were bound by security agreements with that power. The liberation of Kuwait turned all Persian Gulf states but Iraq and Iran to the United States for security protection. Regional states were unwilling to organize such a structure with hostile Iraq and Shia revolutionary Iran, so they decided to bring USA into the region as a formal protector. By signing defense agreement with all conservative monarchies Washington linked its security with the Persian Gulf region.

During the 1990s the USA was working hard on boosting its multilevel presence in the region. Having excellent relations with Arab monarchies, the main aim of that superpower was making Iraq and Iran accept its hegemonic position and not allowing them to reorganize and rebuild their potential. The formal name of that policy was dual containment. Handicapped after 1991, Iraq was under political and economic sanctions and during last decade of the XX century many American-British military actions took place to crush its possibility to play a significant role and rebuild its power. It needs to be underlined that such international restrictions were hurting mainly Iraqi society while the regime itself remained unattached. Similar suppressions, without military actions, were directed towards Iran which 1992 became an object of US sanctions and international restrictions after 1992. Mainly it was the USA that was pushing for Iran's isolation, while European powers and the rest of the world were rather focused on regaining political and economic positions in that state³⁸. The dual contain-

³⁶ H. Hassan-Yari, *Iranian Foreign Policy in the Postwar Era*, in: *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran – Iraq War*, F. Rajaei (ed.), Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997, p. 143.

³⁷ S. Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy: Intentions, Capabilities & Impact*, Washington D.C., A Carnegie Endowment Book, 1994, p. 9.

³⁸ Aliboni R., *Iran and Iraq: Sanctions and Dual Containment. A View from the European Union*, Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2000, <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/air07.pdf>, p. 1–4.

ment policy turned out to be a failure and led on one hand to the American-organized invasion of Iraq and on the other to the present conflict over Iran's ballistic and nuclear programs.

A new climax for cooperation arose in the Persian Gulf at the end of the last century. The election of Mr. Mohammad Khatami as Iran's President gave a signal to regional states and the USA that Iran may be eager to change its attitude towards the security system and adopt new, more moderate policies. Iran successfully normalized relations with regional states in the first half of the 1990s as a result of the détente and rapprochement policy applied under President Hashemi Rafsanjani³⁹. After 1997 there were great hopes for similar reconciliation with the United States. The era of slowly growing normalization in relations between the states did occur. The sport and scientific cooperation was established and President Khatami called for dialogue among civilizations, ideas that were warmly accepted by Washington as a sign of Iran's new posture. In response, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright apologized to the Iranian nation for intervening in Iran's domestic affairs by organizing the overthrow of the nationalistic government in 1953. It looked like the security system of the Persian Gulf might be stabilized and safeguarded by cooperation between Washington and Tehran. Unfortunately international developments at the beginning of 21st century and American misleading or deceptive policies resulted in inflaming American-Iranian conflict, which continues to the present. The hopes for establishment of a security system based on multilevel confidence building measures and on integration and group security idea were ended. All that was achieved by regional states during the 1990s was stabilization of inter-states relation but they failed to "(...) institute communitarians as the dominant mode of regional interaction"⁴⁰.

The 9/11 attacks on the United States reoriented the US policy towards the Persian Gulf. The new neoconservative approach to the US policy made dual the containment policy (balance of power system) no longer an option. The new administration adopted a strategy of promotion of liberal democracy as a to counter the roots of international terrorism⁴¹. The idea to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime and replace it with a fully democratic government was too enthusiastically put in practice. America was not seeing the dangerous traps and jumped into them, almost destabilizing the whole Middle East. It is directly responsible for opening the Muslim Pandora's box. Stabilization mission quickly turned into full scale war between insurgents and coalition forces and what was more important, resulted in the outbreak of Shia – Sunni conflict in Iraq that

³⁹ B. Assadi, *Iran and the Persian Gulf Security, Discourse*, "An Iranian Quarterly", Vol. 3, No. 1, Summer 2001, p. 119.

⁴⁰ A. Adib-Moghaddam, *The International politics of the Persian Gulf. A cultural genealogy*, Routledge 2006, p. 82.

⁴¹ S. Wright, *The United States and the Persian Gulf Security. The Foundations of the War on Terror*, Ithaca Press 2007, p. 184.

spilled over the Persian Gulf, something still considered a main challenge to its security. Also, the territorial integrity of Iraq had to be preserved by all means when Kurds started to organize themselves into a semi-state in northern Iraq. This brought the Kurdish issue to extraordinary level that poses security problems to neighboring states again..

Inclusion of Iran into “Axis of Evil” by US President George W. Bush in 2002 destroyed the process of normalization between the states. Harsh rhetoric, backed by organized international restrictions hardened the Iranian posture and even sped up its controversial nuclear program. Such a US posture helped to radicalize internal Iranian politics and helped “hardliners” to regain full political power in that country. After the USA opened the war on terror, and started more active and complementary policies directed on reshaping the Middle East, Iran became one of the main obstacles to its plans. The theocratic regime is trying to undermine American efforts; the best example of such open confrontation might be seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran became most influential in Iraq due to the close and friendly relations with the major majority – Shia group there. Close religious linkage, common economic interests, together with balanced and pro-stabilization policies of Tehran it to become main player with has most power to shape the future situation in Iraq. Some political commentators even say that the USA a fought long war in Iraq to stabilize it just to give it away to an Iranian sphere of influence. Such a statement is an exaggeration, but it is no exaggeration to say that no successful plans concerning Iraq can be made without taking into consideration the voice of Iran. We cannot say that Iraq is turning into Shia Islamic republic but American decision makers have to deal with the growing Iranian position inside Iraq, something that will complicate its policies in the region.

The US forces finally withdrew from Iraq on December 2011 after more than eight years of the so called stabilization mission. Thousands of lives were sacrificed, billions of dollars were spent for reestablishment of normality in that state but the situation there is still very tense and the next few years will be crucial for the future of Iraq. United States left Iraq with limited success but already new challenges worry American strategists. Without doubt, the USA is ruling the Persian Gulf region. It has established comprehensive linkages with almost all regional states, military and also political, economic, and even ecological links. *Pax Americana* has emerged in the region and so far there is no power that can undermine the US imperial position in the Persian Gulf. The words of S. Wright describe the US position in the best manner: “(...) Following the British withdrawal from the region in 1971, the United States’ position towards the region has steadily evolved through changes brought on from the international, regional and domestic contexts. All in all, the general trend has been for

increased US involvement in the Gulf to the extent that its presence allows it to be considered as the hegemonic player within the region”⁴².

Besides the overwhelming US position in the region other powers, mainly Great Britain, Russia, China and France, are also shaping relations in region. Close, historically rooted, linkages between London and the Arab Sheikdoms are still among most influential ones. Russia, since the end of Cold War is backing Iran and is by many as the main supporter of regime in Tehran. Longstanding military, technological (ballistic missiles and nuclear programs) and economic assistance to Tehran allows that regime to overcome American and international sanctions. However, like the Iraqi case, it is not obvious that Russia will be able to protect its informal ally, Iran, from further American, Israeli or international actions that may break its stubborn position or even lead to regime change. China, due to the huge demand for energy resources and growing political ambitions, is well represented in the region. Other European powers like France, Germany or Italy and Asian ones like Japan or South Korea are also active in the Persian Gulf.

The Persian Gulf security system is rather a security complex. This is not a regional system that was shaped and maintained solely by regional actors. Its exceptional role as a global energy resources reservoir, strategic geopolitical location as well as the heterogeneous and complicated character of internal dynamics prevent the region from forming close and fixed system within the international structure. There is a little possibility that the region will be left alone by outside powers. The USA will continue its penetration and subordination policies and there is little chance that other powers would leverage their position in the region. Right now, the main variable of the region’s hard security is the conflict between Iran and the USA and future developments in the area will be shaped by that issue. But the set of security factors which are crucial to the Persian Gulf is much broader. According to R. E. Hunter, there are eight regional-specific variables that shape security system of the region: the future of Iraq; case of Iran; asymmetric threats; regional reassurance; the Arab-Israeli conflict; regional tensions and conflicts; foreign powers penetration; arms control and confidence-building measures⁴³. However, one more issue needs to be added to that classification – the future of Syria. The so called Arab Spring’ revolts of 2011/2012 that are slowly changing the whole Middle East region have security consequences. The situation on Bahrain is still very fragile and it looks like there is no fix solution to Bahraini internal conflict. The internal system in the other Persian Gulf states has been shaken because of Arab democratic movements. The case of Syria is very important to the politics of Persian Gulf, because of its close alliance with Iran. The possible fall of Assad’s regime would

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 203.

⁴³ R.E. Hunter, *Building Security in the Persian Gulf*, RAND National Security Research Division, 2010, p. 3–4.

complicate the regional security system and may encourage the USA or Israel to military option against Iran.

The Persian Gulf is very important to the international system but regional states are very fragile. We cannot call the situation in the region stable or secure. We certainly have to expect more crucial developments within the region in the very near future that will affect the daily life of every person in the world.

GEOPOLITYKA W REGIONIE ZATOKI PERSKIEJ

Streszczenie. Region Zatoki Perskiej odgrywa bardzo ważną rolę w dzisiejszym systemie bezpieczeństwa. Ogromne zasoby surowców energetycznych stanowią o istotności tego regionu dla bezpieczeństwa energetycznego świata. Poza tym czynnikiem, Zatoka Perska stanowi niejako sworzeń geopolityczny pomiędzy Azją, Afryką i Europą, gdzie krzyżują się interesy najważniejszych mocarstw i podmiotów pozapaństwowych. Szereg czynników wewnętrznych, takich jak różnice etniczne czy kulturowe, wraz z określonymi problemami natury politycznej, ekonomicznej i militarnej, stanowią o „kruchości” systemu bezpieczeństwa tego regionu. Celem artykułu jest analiza głównych problemów regionów, zagrożeń dla jego bezpośredniego bezpieczeństwa, jak również ukazanie ewolucji systemu bezpieczeństwa tego regionu w okresie po II wojnie światowej oraz przedstawienie ewolucji pozycji Stanów Zjednoczonych w tym regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: Zatoka Perska, geopolityka, bezpieczeństwo, polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych, rywalizacja regionalna, problemy energetyczne, Bliski Wschód