

## Original Paper

# The Interests of the United States of America in the Persian Gulf Countries and Security Problems

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### Abstract

*Energy resources play an important role in the process of organizing the national security of a state, which is why establishing control over them is one of the most important goals. That is why the countries of the Persian Gulf are the subject of interest of the leading states of the world, the epicenter of the struggle to secure control over the natural resources of the region. The Persian Gulf is an area of special interest in this direction because it is where the largest reserves of hydrocarbon resources in the world are located today.*

*The Persian Gulf region includes eight states, of which, except for Iran, all countries are Arab (Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Oman). The vast majority of them have the largest deposits of hydrocarbon resources, which determines the great interest in them in the world.*

*Since oil and natural gas have an important place in the modern world economy, the role of countries with these natural resources in world politics is also great. Since the countries of the Persian Gulf have the largest reserves of natural gas and oil in the world, it can be said that the strategic importance of this region will increase in the coming decades.*

*The relevance of the research is also determined by the fact that the successful pursuit of the above-mentioned states' own strategic interests is facilitated by systematic intelligence activities. Along with this, the relevance of the research is defined by the fact that on the international level from a military-political point of view, the region is important due to the possibilities of deployment of military*

*bases in the target states, including through intelligence activities, and to identify the threats expected from them.*

**Keywords**

*Politics, Countries, Region, Oil, Natural Gas, Persian Gulf, Intelligence Activities, Military-Political Intelligence, Military Bases*

**1. Introduction**

Despite some political changes, the fact is that the US is still one of the influential non-regional actors in the Persian Gulf. It takes a lot of effort to maintain this position. Other external regional actors are also influencing the ongoing political processes in the Persian Gulf.

The Persian Gulf has been an important target for foreign intelligence activities since the "Cold War" period. An analysis of open source (US and UK intelligence) information reveals that (Note 1) by 1975, the Soviet Union was systematically increasing its military-naval and air activities, as well as the number of military bases and port facilities in the Persian Gulf. Based on the same source, two destroyers and one command ship stationed in Bahrain and the Persian Gulf are used to control a strategically important target for the US. With the collapse of the enemy - the Soviet Union - the USA has maintained solid control mechanisms in the Persian Gulf with active and successful intelligence activities, thus having the opportunity to receive significant military-political and economic benefits.

**2. The Intelligence Nature of Military Bases**

Subject to geostrategic interests, in terms of gaining dominance in the international arena, the organizational process of placing military bases in the target states or strategically important points, including in the neighborhood of target countries, plays a special role in ensuring intelligence control and penetration in the target objects (state; geographic segment). This issue was relevant during the "Cold War" and is still relevant today.

According to the status received by the controller, the bases of the mentioned type are favorable both for intelligence recruitment, blackmail, compromise, intimidation, training of terrorist groups, and anti-state groups against the target country, equipping them with weapons and ammunition, as well as smuggling activities carried out under the intelligence umbrella corresponding to the interests of the spying state. At the same time, military bases can be used for the production of a radio-technical type of intelligence.

As early as 1977, Brzezinski, the national security adviser to US President Nixon, was hinting at the need to create military forces that could be deployed quickly, including in the Persian Gulf. In this context, the information published in the open source is noteworthy, according to which the attitude of US President Jimmy Carter towards the Persian Gulf in 1980 is revealed. He believed that any attempt by an outside power to intervene in the exercise of control would be an injury to the vital interests of the USA.

The military bases of the United States of America, which are subordinate to the US Central Command, are located in the territories of the member states of the "Gulf Cooperation Council". The presence of a large number of American armed forces in the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula allows us to draw important conclusions. The Persian Gulf is of great importance for US political interests. The presence of American military bases in the region points out the partnership relations with the member states of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" on the part of the USA. These states also represent a more or less pro-Western position on the world stage: the US intends to create a new architecture of regional security, where it will have a leading role, where it will be able to unite the armed forces of the member states of the "Gulf Cooperation Council". In light of recent developments both in the Middle East region and specifically in the Persian Gulf, it seems that this idea of the USA is less feasible.

### *2.1 The USA Interests*

The importance of its interests in the Persian Gulf is confirmed by the fact that, despite ongoing debates about reducing the US military contingent abroad in order to save budgetary funds, it still keeps its military forces in the Persian Gulf in order to maintain its recently relatively reduced strategic advantage in the region. The V Fleet of the United States Navy, stationed in Bahrain, is proof of this. The area of operation of the said fleet is the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and part of the Indian Ocean. (Note 2)

All the states of the Persian Gulf, except Iraq and Iran, are members of the "Gulf Cooperation Council", which was established in 1981 to carry out policies ensuring security and economic security and to implement coordinated actions.

### *2.2 Saudi Arabia*

Even though there are no democratic regimes in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, it was still possible for these states to establish constructive relations with the USA. One of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council - Saudi Arabia is the main military-political partner of the United States, it is one of the main strategic partners of the United States of America not only in the Persian Gulf but also in the entire Middle Eastern policy. The US military base "Esan Village" is located on its territory. (Note 3) It is also worth noting that the relationship between these two countries has somewhat deteriorated in recent years, which is connected with the murder of American citizen, journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. (Note 4) It was added to the disagreement between the USA and Saudi Arabia regarding oil during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, and the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia at the initiative of China this year in March.

The importance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States of America is determined by its geopolitical location. This country occupies the largest part of the Arabian Peninsula and has the largest reserves of hydrocarbon resources. In addition, Saudi Arabia plays an important role in the Islamic world, because the most important Islamic sanctuaries: Mecca and Medina are located on its territory. These circumstances further increase the authority of Saudi Arabia and allow it to influence most of the countries of the Persian Gulf. In the relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States of America,

it is this kingdom that represents a peculiar balance of the ambitions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Persian Gulf region.

As already mentioned above, one of the areas of interest of the United States of America in Saudi Arabia is due to the oil factor. However, the mentioned factor is not unique in the relationship between these states, as it is common concerning the other countries in the region as well.

The active intelligence activities carried out by the US against Saudi Arabia are confirmed by the "US intelligence report" (Note 5), according to which the USA intelligence agency had information about the organization of the assassination of the Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, according to which permission of assassination was granted by the future king of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman. However, due to the strategic interests of the US, neither financial nor other sanctions were imposed on Bin Salman. With a high degree of probability, in the absence of response mechanisms, the USA received significant military-political and economic benefits, either through intelligence penetration or intelligence-compromising evidence, using blackmail.

Among the countries of the Persian Gulf, the State of Qatar has a special place for the United States of America. When the USA military base "Prince Sultan" in Saudi Arabia was closed, it was moved to the military base "Al-Udeid" in **Qatar**. The political authority of Qatar has also grown significantly in recent decades. Qatar is trying to play one of the main roles on the political map of the region, not only in the Persian Gulf. This provides support for the USA to expand its interests in the Islamic world. (Note 6)

### *2.3 Qatar*

The great attention of the United States of America towards Qatar and Saudi Arabia is because they play an important role within the framework of the two largest international organizations - the "Muslim World League" and the "Arab League". The fact is that at the modern stage, Qatar and Saudi Arabia largely determine the direction of the activities of these two organizations, because they have a significant influence on the positions of other member states of these organizations and, accordingly, they also affect the dynamics of political processes in the Middle East.

As of 2016, the USA was conducting intelligence activities concerning Qatar and had significant data on the "financial support for terrorist and extremist (especially regional) groups" (Note 7) by this state. In 2017, Qatar's support for Islamist extremists remained an important problem for the USA. The possibility of obtaining the mentioned information would be unthinkable without the activities of the USA intelligence. The results of intelligence interests and coordination by the Trump administration may be considered the "imposition of an embargo on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates" (Note 8) giving it the status of an intelligence embargo. To support the expressed opinion, an analysis (Note 9) of the information published in the open source is useful, according to which in November 2021 an agreement was signed between the USA and Qatar concerning Afghanistan, including the implementation of US interests in Afghanistan.

#### 2.4 Kuwait

The United States of America managed to establish constructive relations with Kuwait within the framework of regional cooperation. A new stage in their relations began in 1990 after Iraq invaded Kuwait, where the USA supported Kuwait. The state of Kuwait has a favorable geostrategic location for the US. It is located right next to Iraq, and because of this, it became one of the main bases for US military units during the 2003 US military operations in Iraq. During this military campaign in Iraq, two military bases located in the territory of Kuwait were used by the USA. These are: "Ahmed al-Jaber" and "Ali al-Salem". Despite the end of the military operation in Iraq and the withdrawal of the American military from there, Kuwait has not lost its geostrategic importance for the United States of America, because this state could be used to carry out military or humanitarian operations in Iraq or Iran if necessary. So, Kuwait is a strategic partner for the United States of America in the Persian Gulf. It should be noted that in terms of intelligence activities, Kuwait was used by the United States of America as a favorable state for intelligence operations (including recruitment) as early as during the Cold War. To support this opinion, the open source information (Note 10) is referred to, according to which the transportation route of the family of the "missing" Soviet spy Oleg Spirin from Kuwait, who was sent on a business trip to Kuwait, "immediately after his disappearance" looks like this: Great Britain-U.S.A.

In terms of intelligence vulnerabilities, the fact that within the framework of the strategic partnership, the US "assists Kuwait, including in the study and training of the military and in conducting combat operations" (Note 11) is important. In fact, we see favorable conditions for military intelligence vulnerabilities.

#### 2.5 Bahrain

Another US regional partner in the Persian Gulf is Bahrain. The headquarters of the US Navy, the Fifth Fleet is based in the capital of this country, which is subordinate to the Central Command of the United States of America. Also, another US military base is located on the territory of Bahrain, which was used by the United States of America during the Iraq operation in 2003.

Bahrain has an important geographical location in the Persian Gulf. The presence of the US Navy on the peninsula of Qatar and Bahrain allows it to control the passage amid the Persian Gulf. Controlling this zone gives the US access to sea lanes located in the Persian Gulf and thereby the possibility to protect oil pipelines located in Kuwait, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. The US interest in Bahrain is determined by the above-mentioned situation. The fact that the Kingdom of Bahrain supported the United States of America in two military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is a confirmation of the partnership between Bahrain and the United States of America. Despite (as of 2018) the existence of a compromised government in Bahrain, the US actively cooperates with it based on its own military-strategic and military-political interests. State security, as well as the oil and gas sectors, have the same controlling persons. Massive corruption ("Unchecked spending on security and rampant corruption could topple the Bahraini regime and threaten U.S. interests." (Note 12)), the large scale of

illegal arrests, including those containing signs of political motives, the disallowance of political opposition in the parliamentary elections, the organization of religious harassment became an important basis for the downfall of the authority of the Bahraini government.

The USA has a high level of intelligence accessibility in Bahrain, which provides control over the extent of government and corruption, among other important areas of control.

## *2.6 United Arab Emirates*

The United Arab Emirates, together with Bahrain, is the state that fully supported the United States of America in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and sent its military contingent to Afghanistan. The US military air base "Al-Dhafra" is located on the territory of the mentioned state. The presence of US military forces in the United Arab Emirates is explained by the fact that the coast of the Strait of Hormuz belongs to this country. This strait connects the Oman Gulf and the Persian Gulf. The Strait of Hormuz is important because the hydrocarbon resources of all the states in the Persian Gulf are exported through it.

The United Arab Emirates is a dynamically developing state that pushes the Gulf Cooperation Council towards economic development, which leads to the rise of its political authority in the region. Consequently, its influence on other member states of the Council is increasing. Predominantly these circumstances became decisive for the USA (Note 13) to establish relations with these states.

It is important to consider the fact that in the background of the rapprochement, the USA is actively carrying out intelligence activities against the United Arab Emirates. This is confirmed by the information published in the open source - "U.S. Intelligence Report". (Note 14)

There is a high probability that the USA is engaged in intelligence activities in the background of strategic partnership, which would be unthinkable without agent penetration in the direction of political, military, and economic intelligence.

## *2.7 Oman*

Among the countries of the Persian Gulf, the Sultanate of Oman also has an extremely important geostrategic position. It occupies part of the Strait of Hormuz, which largely determines the presence of US military bases in its territory. Oman is the only member country of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which, despite its cooperation with the USA, has managed and maintained bilateral cooperative relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, including even in the military sphere. The mentioned circumstance is of political importance and it represents an opportunity for the USA to have a mediator in negotiations with Iran in the form of the Sultanate of Oman if the need arises. In addition to the above, the USA has created a favorable situation in the direction of using Oman for intelligence purposes (including information provision) against Iran.

The analysis of information available in the open source (Note 15, Note 16) shows that since the 70s of the last century, the Central Intelligence Service had close relations with the advisers invited to the Omani government. In 1972-1974, US citizen Sterling was invited to the Ministry of Oil of Oman as a consultant in the field of energy. He had close contact with the Central Intelligence Agency. The

Central Intelligence Agency was distinguished by its active actions even in the 90s of the last century. All this indicates that favorable conditions were created in Oman for the USA for the acquisition and improvement of its intelligence information and agent network. It should be noted that in 2015-2018, a representative of the US Special Service (FBI) worked in the government of Oman (Muscat, Oman) (Note 17), whose goal was to pursue the priority policies of the Special Service of his country. Accordingly, the creation of a legal position to ensure US intelligence influence penetration has become a reality.

### *2.8 Iraq*

Iraq was one of the leading states in the region before the start of the American military campaign there, which was facilitated by its geopolitical location. It is the third country in the Persian Gulf region in terms of the number of hydrocarbon resources it owns.

During Saddam Hussein's regime (1979-2003), Iraq pursued an aggressive policy aimed at expanding and dominating its geopolitical influence in the region. A good example of this is the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 and also Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. This kind of policy opposed the US strategy in the Persian Gulf, which became the reason for its military intervention in Iraq in 2003, the purpose of which was to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein and establish a pro-American government in this state.

The military campaign in Iraq dealt a serious blow to US authority in many directions. It was assessed by the international community as a violation of the principle of sovereign equality, which is one of the basic principles of international law. This contributed to the rise of anti-American sentiment in the Middle East region. Moreover, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the USA failed to establish a stable political regime in Iraq. In 2019-2020, the Western coalition led by the USA destroyed the terrorist organization "Islamic State" in this country. Battles of particular intensity took place in the Mosul area, which ended with the victory of the Iraqi army (which was accompanied by the Iranian army) and the coalition forces.

Despite the withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq and the arrival of pro-Iranian forces at the head of the government, the US has a whole set of interests in this country. Namely: the existence of a regime loyal to the West in Iraq and unimpeded access to its hydrocarbon resources. The fight against radical Islamist groups also remains a priority for the USA. As a result of Operation "Free Iraq", the US gained access to the oil resources of Iraq and thus diversified its oil supply, at that time it managed to reduce its dependence on Saudi Arabia, in the form of Iraq, it then gained another leverage of influence on OPEC ("Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries") and allowed it to occupy another strategically important geopolitical point in the Persian Gulf through control of Iraqi territory aimed at establishing control over the region. (Note 18) It should be noted that US intelligence activities were active against this state. The analysis of the information published in the open source (Note 19; Note 20) shows that the US intelligence service was actively operating under the cover of the United Nations in order to control Saddam Hussein. At the same time, intelligence penetration into the

internal security structures of Iraq was actively and successfully carried out. Consequently, these processes significantly led to the organization of the violent overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. The chronology of events and processes indicates signs of strong US intelligence influence and penetration in Iraq.

### *2.9 Iran*

Iran is one of the reasons for the presence of US military forces in the region today. There were approximately 125,000 American soldiers in the immediate vicinity of Iran, of which 90,000 were involved in operations in Afghanistan, and 20,000 were stationed at various military bases under the control of the United States in the region. US interests in Iran are related to its geographic location, among other reasons. Iran is located at the crossroads of several regions. Namely: South Asia, Middle East, South Caucasus and Central Asia. It has large reserves of hydrocarbon resources located both in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Iran also occupies an important geostrategic position in the Persian Gulf, which is manifested in the control of almost the entire northern coast of the Strait of Hormuz, and therefore, if necessary, it can (hypothetically) block the movement of ships in this strait, thereby endangering both the US and its ally states. It will also pose a threat to the economic well-being of the member states of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" (Note 21).

The USA sees Iran as the main geopolitical adversary in the Persian Gulf region, whose policy is against US interests. It largely depends on the nuclear program of Iran and Tehran's desire in general to stand up against the results achieved by the US in regional politics. If Iran develops nuclear weapons, the US fears that this state will be able to develop an even more aggressive foreign policy, it (Iran) will put pressure on the energy policy of the Arab monarchies, and these states, certain organizations (including terrorist organizations) that are not distinguished with friendship with the US, will have full support (Note 22).

Israel complicates Iran-US relations even more and hinders the political dialogue between these countries. Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and advised the rest of the world to do the same. This idea gained minimal support in Europe, and his decision greatly angered the Arab world. Despite this, the United States of America did not back down.

At the present stage, Iran is an influential state in the Persian Gulf, which has its own vision of regional development both in terms of economics and security. Its vision excludes the presence of the United States in the region. Concerning Iran, the interests of the US lie in not allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons. Maintaining the security of its partner states in the Persian Gulf is paramount for the US. It is also trying (Note 23) to prevent Iran from becoming the leading state in the Persian Gulf region and increasing Tehran's influence over Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, tries to create the possibility of establishing a pro-Western political regime in Iran in the future. As for stopping the growth of Iran's influence on Iraq and the states of the Arabian Peninsula, this process has become irreversible. As time goes by, Iran's influence here is growing, as we have already talked about above.

Active intelligence activities between the US and Iran are indicated by the existence of exchange



processes of persons arrested on charges of espionage in favor of their own interests. This is confirmed by the analysis of open sources (Note 24). Both Iran and the US arrest persons/groups of persons working for espionage as part of counterintelligence measures.

The political processes that have been going on in **Yemen** for 7 years are destabilizing the situation in the Persian Gulf region. Yemen is not a state located in the Persian Gulf region, although it shares borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia. The process of negotiations regarding Yemen's desire to become a member of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" has been quite long (since 2005). The internal political situation in Yemen is tense due to the rise of separatist sentiments in the northern part of the country, which significantly complicates the process of state development. The political crisis in this country intensified under the conditions of the "Arab Spring", as a result of which the country's authorities lost control over certain provinces of Yemen. Due to the difficult internal political situation in Yemen, the terrorist organization "Al-Qaeda" has intensified its activities in this country. The central base of the Al-Qaeda group is located in Yemen, and it carries out its destructive activities on the territory of the entire Arabian Peninsula. All this has a negative impact on the ongoing political processes in the Persian Gulf region, as two large countries of this region - Iran and Saudi Arabia - are involved in it.

#### *2.10 US and other External Actors*

In the Persian Gulf, the United States of America is one of the most influential external regional players. Other leading countries such as India and China are also becoming active in this region. In March of this year, the People's Republic of China acted as a mediator in the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There is an opinion that by 2030, China will receive 40 percent of the oil purchased in the Persian Gulf, and India will receive 50 percent (Note 25).

The geo-economic interests of India and China create a demand (Note 26) for stable regional systems of international relations in the Persian Gulf, which also includes the problems related to Iran's nuclear program. This circumstance allows us to conclude, that the mentioned states will try to deeply get involved in the security-ensuring activities and stabilization processes in the region, which oppose the interests of the USA in the region.

The strengthening of the positions of such leading states as China, Russia, India and influential integration organizations such as The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, makes the dominant position of the USA in the Persian Gulf questionable. However, it is still a bit premature to talk about the essential change of the place and role of the USA in the architecture of modern international relations.

As soon as the total dominance of the United States in the system of international relations comes to an end, the unipolar system will also end immediately. Although the global role of the US may be weakened in the system of international relations where it is the leader, it can still remain in a dominant position in the long run. (Note 27) During the presidency of Barack Obama (2009-2017), the strategic importance of different regions of the world was assessed for the US, which was revealed by its heavy involvement in the political processes of the Middle East. (Note 28) The place and role of the Persian

Gulf in the regional partnership are not clear. For the United States of America, the Persian Gulf is valuable in the new strategy, as economic prosperity is directly related to the continuous supply of hydrocarbon resources from the Persian Gulf region, which is possible under the conditions of a safe and peaceful region.

### 3. Conclusion

The Arab countries of the Persian Gulf have an important place for the US, which is due to existing geo-economic and geo-political interests in them. The main goal of the US foreign policy is to provide unhindered access to energy resources in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, which will increase its influence on the oil-rich world economy and, accordingly, on the world market. The USA maintains the presence of its military bases in the territory of the member states of the "Gulf Cooperation Council", which are still the main military and political partners of this country.

The main threat to the US for regional interests is the political course pursued by Iran. Iran's nuclear program is named by the US as a security problem for its partner states in the Persian Gulf. The main interest of the US is to maintain its influence in the Persian Gulf, to prevent the creation of nuclear weapons by Iran, and to promote the change of the current political regime in this country to a pro-Western one, which is a necessary condition for the full control of the region in the future by the USA.

Even though the US is one of the influential non-regional actors in the Persian Gulf, due to the large number of natural hydrocarbon resources available here, it is also the object of interest of other leading states (including Russia, and China). For the United States, this problem will become relevant in case if its authority in the world weakens and anti-American sentiments increase in the region. Currently, it is in the interests of the United States to maintain a stable situation in the Persian Gulf, but due to the political situation in the world and specifically in this region, it is difficult to create a stable environment without a partnership with other leading states. The United States of America is trying to maintain its dominant position in the Persian Gulf for as long as possible. How far it will be able to maintain this advantage will be shown by further developments, as the political situation in the Persian Gulf is changing significantly, which was reflected in the recent relations between the leading countries of the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Saudi Arabia and the US.

Systematic intelligence activities contributed to the successful pursuit of US strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. Ever since the "Cold War" period, the Persian Gulf has been an important target for foreign intelligence activities. As of today, with the coordinated actions of the USA, the intelligence control of the Persian Gulf countries has been practically achieved in its favor.

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