A Comparative Study of the Factors Influencing the Formation of Regional and Trans-Regional Security Patterns in the Persian Gulf

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ABSTRACT

The Persian Gulf is regarded as one of the world's most strategically significant regions, having witnessed a diverse range of political, economic, and social events throughout history. Its strategic importance for global powers is amplified by its vast energy reserves, particularly oil. In recent years, the region has been plagued by tensions-inducing developments, encompassing a broad spectrum of actions such as the United States' imposition of oil sanctions on Iran since 2019, the creation of maritime insecurity for vessels and oil tankers, and the execution of Operation Azure Blue (the assassination of Qasem Soleimani), rendering the situation in the Persian Gulf increasingly volatile and fragile. This underscores the urgent need for establishing a sustainable security paradigm (either regional or trans-regional) in the Persian Gulf. The primary objective of this research is to examine, identify, analyze, and comparatively evaluate the internal, regional, and global factors that contribute to the establishment of a sustainable security pattern within the region under investigation. Consequently, the central research question guiding this inquiry is: "What factors, respectively, influence the formation or creation of a sustainable security pattern at the internal, regional, and international levels?" To answer this crucial question, the researcher meticulously gathers data and information through meticulous analysis of existing literature and documentation. This accumulated knowledge is then subjected to rigorous analysis employing a descriptive methodology and the conceptual framework of Barry Buzan's regional security complex. Drawing upon the findings gleaned from this comprehensive research, the following conclusions emerge: the type of political system adopted by the regional states, coupled with the challenge of legitimacy crises, stands as the most prominent internal factor impacting the formation of regional and trans-regional security patterns in the Persian Gulf. Distrust, the perception of a hypothetical enemy, and territorial disputes stand out as the most influential regional-level factors contributing to the formation of these patterns. Finally, energy emerges as the pivotal international factor shaping the region's security landscape. Informed by these compelling findings, we can reasonably argue that state actors, standing as the preeminent players within the regional and international political arenas, actively seek patterns that not only maximize benefits and gains but also minimize expenditure to the greatest extent possible. In light of this, it becomes apparent that fostering a security accord between Saudi Arabia and Iran likely holds the key to achieving the optimal balance of maximized benefits and reduced costs within the Persian Gulf region. Should this accord fail to materialize, an unsettling veil of uncertainty will likely continue to shroud the region's security outlook.

Introduction

The Persian Gulf, recognized for its vital significance for both regional countries and global powers alike, demonstrably constitutes an exception to the aforementioned concerns.

Throughout history, this strategic epicenter has held the unwavering attention of global powers, a dynamic that persists to this day. From a geopolitical standpoint, the Persian Gulf boasts an unparalleled position within the

international system. Furthermore, the region is a veritable treasure trove of rich energy resources, encompassing 1.59% of the world's proven oil reserves and an impressive 40% of global proven gas reserves (BP's Statistical Review of World Energy, 2021).

Beyond serving as a significant source of energy reserves, the Persian Gulf is also instrumental in supplying roughly 41% of global oil requirements. Notably, half of this daily oil consumption transits through the strategically significant Strait of Hormuz. Based on these compelling observations, we can confidently assert that the region possesses the potential to profoundly impact global equations and transformations. When we examine the context through which developments unfold, a multifaceted and dynamic picture emerges within this strategic waterway, a microcosm of the broader international system. Within its depths lie diverse layers and levels, often marked by intricate differences and, at times, even conflicting interests. Notably, this region grapples with an array of challenges in the form of ethnic, racial, and linguistic disparities, historical disputes, identity-based conflicts, and territorial disagreements, particularly in areas where shared energy reserves exist. Among these factors, the region's strategic importance has acted as a magnet for trans-regional powers, further exacerbating the existing precariousness and security challenges.

Given the contrasting approaches adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran on the regional stage, coupled with the persistent disputes with other nations such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and trans-regionally, with the United States and several European countries, this study sets out to meticulously investigate and compare the diverse factors, elements, and components that exert a profound influence on the formation and presentation of both regional and trans-regional security arrangements within the Persian Gulf region. The overarching goal is to determine which of these security paradigms

offers the most favorable prospects for laying the groundwork for a future characterized by peace and stability within the Persian Gulf region. Acknowledging that the sole path toward achieving sustainable peace and stability hinges on the establishment of a well-defined regional security framework, this analysis delves into exploring, using the lens of Barry Buzan's concept of regional collective security, the cooperative security model as it pertains to the Persian Gulf context.

This nuanced model lends itself to examination through two distinct lenses: sustainable cooperation and the equally significant concept of limited cooperation (Aqarebparast, 2012: 87-88).

Notably, sustainable cooperation emphasizes achieving a shared convergence and alignment of national positions among regional states. (snyder,1999: 110) In contrast, limited cooperation, which emphasizes relative development and consensus-building among regional actors, centers around forging relations based on the fundamental principles of co-existence, shared understanding, and calibrated coordination. Within the context of the Persian Gulf region, a scenario where limited cooperation can be established among these diverse states holds significant promise and potential. This is particularly true in the case of Iran and Saudi Arabia, nations whose engagement with one another could potentially begin at a measured level, initially focused on low-tension technical fields and gradually evolving towards a stage marked by sustainable cooperation encompassing both political and economic domains.

In an era marked by the region's increasing militarization, coupled with the observation that the security landscape of the Persian Gulf is veiled in a sense of ambiguity, where the definition of the security region rests in the hands of trans-regional powers, it proves essential to move beyond a mere examination of the political, economic, social, and cultural factors influencing regional and trans-regional security patterns. Instead, we must strive to elucidate the most effective security model,

taking into account existing mechanisms. This can not only pave the way for groundbreaking future studies but, more importantly, enhance our collective understanding of diverse regional security patterns. It is within this broader context that this research places its focus on: a comparative study that delves into analyzing the factors that exert a transformative influence on the shaping of regional and trans-regional security patterns in the Persian Gulf region. Our analysis will pay particular attention to examining the separability and feasibility of these security paradigms from the perspective of uncovering novel dimensions within this area of research.

Research Hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis:

1. Regional security based on the participation of all countries in the region offers a more favorable prospect for creating peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region.

The sub-hypotheses of this research are as follows:

2. It seems that the social structure, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences, land disputes, influence, distribution of power, conflicting views, and convergent regional groups are the effective factors in shaping the security pattern of the Persian Gulf based on the variables of the micro-level of analysis.
3. It seems that security dependence, distribution of power, geopolitics, energy, ideological interests, arms race, and anarchy are the effective factors in shaping the security pattern of the Persian Gulf based on the variables of the macro-level of analysis.
4. Iran's plan under the title of the "Coalition of Hope (Peace of Hormuz)", the logic of which is endogenous security for the Persian Gulf and the

Strait of Hormuz, and a shift from the concept of buying security to relying on the nations of the region themselves and cooperation among them, can be a more favorable prospect for long-term peace and stability in the region.
5. Reviewing security plans such as the Nixon-Kissinger Doctrine, the policy of bilateral containment, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab NATO, and the Abraham Accords indicates that the trans-regional security patterns in the Persian Gulf by the United States are a continuation and consolidation of its alliances in the region and the continuation of arms sales to the region based on the pattern of acquiring insular security and supporting the security of its allies and the continuation of the policy of Iranophobia.

Research Methods:

The present study is applied in terms of its objective, descriptive in terms of its nature and method, and "descriptive-analytical" in terms of the writing style and addressing the research issue.

Factors Influencing the Formation of Regional and Trans-Regional Security Patterns in the Persian Gulf:

In this chapter of the article, we will discuss the factors influencing the formation of the Persian Gulf security complex at two levels: internal and regional.

1. **Factors Influencing the Formation of Regional Security in the Persian Gulf:**

At the internal level, security arrangements in the Gulf countries that have endangered the internal security of countries and caused insecurity and instability in the country, and consequently led to insecurity in the region, are found in numerous ways.
The countries of the Persian Gulf region have

an authoritarian political system and are considered as sheikhdoms with no civil society. The countries of the Persian Gulf have weak legitimacy, and they have always tried to use Islam, tradition, and tribalism as symbols of their legitimacy (Abdulla, 2010: 13-14).

The origin of the existing crises and conflicts in the Persian Gulf region can be analyzed and understood at different levels. One of these levels is domestic challenges, and the most important of them is the incomplete process of nation-state building and the unsatisfactory functioning of governments. (Sanaei, 1395: 50). .The process of nation-state building on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf is different from its northern part, which has a longer civilization history and experience in governance. The history of tribal and dynastic rule, the closed structure of the tribal system, the paternalistic and one-sided relations prevalent in them, and the absolute belonging and pure loyalty to the tribe, sheiks, and its leaders have been barriers to the formation of new concepts and the beginning of the process of nation-state building and the formation of a nation-state in these lands (Sanaei, 1395: 50).

The political-security system based on the balance of power in the Persian Gulf region was mainly designed on the axis of traditional threats between states during the Cold War and the specific conditions of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, based on the demands and interests of trans-regional actors and their local allies. Such a system emphasizes "contradictions" and "differences," and therefore, in nature, whether in its traditional or modern form, it has been a source of insecurity, and in practice, given the emergence of new geopolitical changes after the Iraq crisis, it cannot be realized in its traditional form in the region. First, the focus on the balance of power in the past and present has not been a successful experience, and from within it, the increase in the arms race, the direct presence of foreign forces, and the formation of new security puzzles, the dependence of the Arab governments of the region on the American security umbrella, and in general, the creation of tension, competition,

distrust, and war in relations between the governments and nations of the region have emerged. In this regard, the Iran-Iraq war is a kind of result of the balance of power.

In the Persian Gulf, old Shia-Sunni enmities and non-state actors play a very important role. The patterns of hostility and friendship within are created by history, politics, culture, and ethnicity. A history of mutual hatred, friendships, and particular issues that lead to conflict or cooperation based on fear, threats, and friendships define the regional security complex. Along with friendship and enmity, the relations between the Gulf countries are defined by power relations. (Grabowski,2020,23)

2. Factors Influencing the Formation of the Trans-Regional Security Pattern in the Persian Gulf:

The trans-regional level, which Buzan says has had a powerful performance in the region, Buzan & Wæver, 2003,35) deals with the effects of external factors and variables on the Middle East region and includes the competition of the great powers in the 20th century, the world wars, the Cold War, the international system of September 11, and beyond, which has been involved in the Persian Gulf region. The presence of great powers in the region can be seen in three forms: energy, democracy, arms exports, and interference in regional issues, which has fueled insecurity and instability in the Persian Gulf.

Oil, which has been the cause of many global and regional wars and competitions in the past, and Western countries have not spared any effort to dominate the rich energy resources in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, which has somehow highlighted the position of energy in the Persian Gulf in the foreign policy of the great powers (Ajiili, 2020: 126). Thus, oil has been a source of good and blessing for the countries of the region, but it has also led to the emergence of long-term crises and conflicts in the region, the effects of which are still quite

clear today and have turned the Middle East into the most crisis-ridden region in the world. One of the main goals of the Western world and the United States in the Middle East specifically the Persian Gulf can be considered the expansion of democratic institutions under the guise of soft power (Mottaqi, 2015: 135). The various plans of Western countries, especially the United States, for different regions, including the Greater Middle East plan, are pursued in the form of different and goal-oriented scenarios.

In addition to the issue of energy, militarization, and arms exports are also the most important factors influencing security in the Persian Gulf region. The military balance between Iran, its Arab neighbors, and the United States is an important military issue in the Persian Gulf.

3. **Comparison of Factors Influencing the Formation of Regional and Trans-Regional Patterns:**

The factors influencing the regional and trans-regional order pattern can be compared from several perspectives. In the first aspect, one can pay attention to the method and model of their influence. In this regard, the models of influence of factors are considered in two ways: bottom-up or top-down. The bottom-up pattern refers to micro-mechanisms in which variables and dynamics from within regional actors influence the regional order pattern (Abdullah Khani, 2010: 229). At this level, two variables, legitimacy, and the resulting crisis, along with nation-state building, have been studied. These two variables can be considered, in various ways, among the factors influencing the regional pattern and also the trans-regional factors influencing the regional pattern.

The crisis of legitimacy or the lack of legitimacy, through creating security and political concerns or through the occurrence of centrifugal social movements or those calling for a change in political systems, can cause a regional security complex to undergo significant changes. In the first aspect, if the crisis of legitimacy leads to political instability in a regional actor, and if this nation-state conflicts with another state, this can cause a crisis in the regional security complex. In this regard, states generally clash over the existence of ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic regions, and as a result, the pattern governing their relations changes to a hostile pattern, and the regional security complex goes into crisis. The dispute between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Armenian-populated region of Artsakh, which is located within the territory of Azerbaijan, can be considered an example of the influence of ethnic and linguistic groups on the regional security pattern. However, this crisis is not due to a crisis of legitimacy in either of the two countries mentioned.
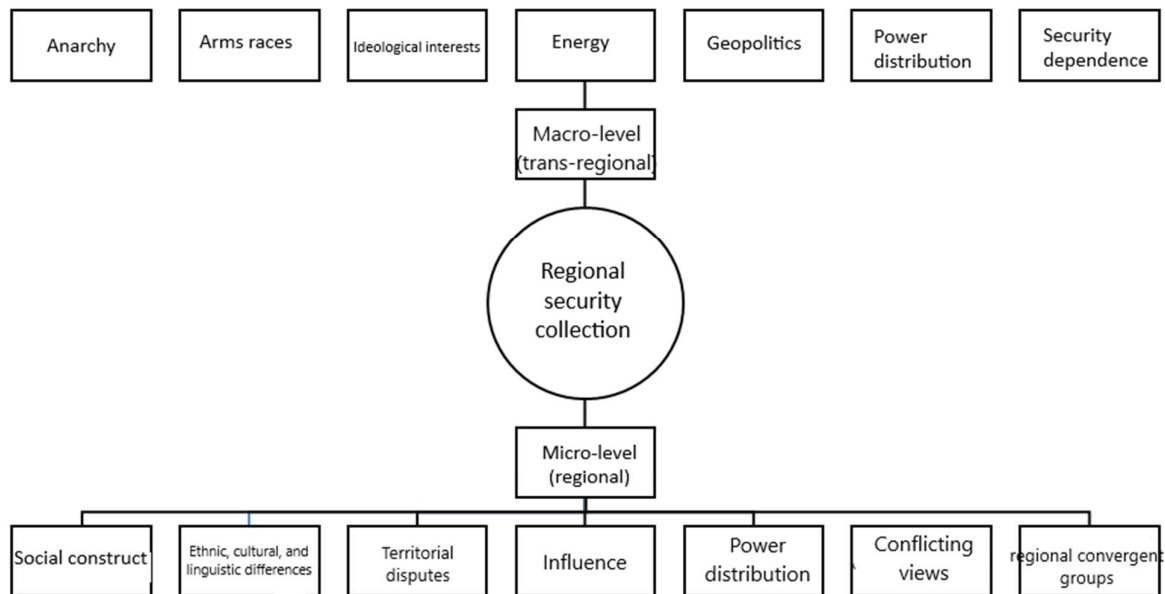
Fig. 1: Factors influencing the formation of the Persian Gulf security pattern based on variables at two levels of micro and macro analysis

Fig. 1 shows the factors influencing the formation of the security pattern of the Persian Gulf based on the variables of the two levels of micro and macro analysis. However, it should be noted that these variables have been divided into these two levels merely for further explanation, and they have the capacity and potential to influence each other at different levels.

Mousavi (2008) analyzed security arrangements and patterns in the Persian Gulf region. This article examines the approaches of two interventionist powers, Britain and the United States, in regulating the security arrangements of the Persian Gulf while reviewing various theories concerning the interpretation of security frameworks for the region. Disagreements and perceptual conflicts between trans-regional actors regarding the regional arrangements of the Persian Gulf are addressed in this thesis.

Akhbari et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine the regional factors affecting security developments in the Persian Gulf and the role of influential actors and propose a hypothetical model for this region. They aim to offer solutions for the future of the region considering Iran's position and strategic inclinations. In this paper, we intend to investigate the feasibility of each of the regional and trans-regional security patterns that could bring more peace and stability to the region, in addition to Iran as an important and powerful regional country. Other countries in the region will also be examined, as all countries in the region must play an effective and active role in this regard.

Conceptual Model of the Research:

In explaining the conditions and factors influencing the formation of the Persian Gulf security complex, it is essential to examine the internal and regional components, the role of trans-regional actors, and, in general, the global level, which plays the role of interventionist actors, in this security complex. The factors influencing the regional and trans-regional order pattern can be compared from several perspectives. In the first aspect, one can pay attention to the method and model of their influence. In this regard, the models of

influence of factors are considered in two ways: bottom-up or top-down. The bottom-up pattern refers to micro-mechanisms in which variables and dynamics from within regional actors influence the regional order pattern. At this level, two variables, legitimacy, and the resulting crisis, along with nation-state building, have been studied. These two variables can be considered, in various ways, among the factors influencing the regional pattern and also the trans-regional factors influencing the regional pattern. At the internal level, the crisis of legitimacy and the incomplete process of nation-state building have endangered the internal security of countries, causing insecurity and instability within the country, and consequently leading to insecurity in the region. The countries of the Persian Gulf region have an authoritarian political system and, due to their weak legitimacy, have always tried to use Islam, tradition, and tribalism as symbols of their legitimacy. In general, the factors influencing the formation of regional and trans-regional security in the Persian Gulf are illustrated in
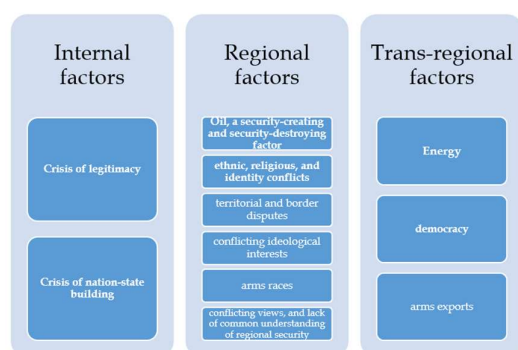

Fig. 2. Factors Influencing the Formation of Regional and Trans-Regional Security Patterns in the Persian Gulf

Conclusion:

The author seeks to analyze the cooperative security model in the Persian Gulf region by examining Barry Buzan's concept of regional collective security. The analysis of factors influencing the formation of security patterns in the region reveals that internal, regional, and global factors have consistently impacted the

relationships between the region's countries and hindered the establishment of stable security, resulting in a negative impact on the formation of a security framework thus far.

Within the framework of the main hypothesis, considering the documented evidence and the complex context of the Persian Gulf countries, the geopolitics of the region, and the role of power in international politics, it becomes evident that regional security based on the participation of all countries offers a more promising prospect for establishing peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region. Therefore, given their reliance on and purchase of external security, the countries in the region have not been able to achieve stability thus far and should instead pursue an internally-driven security plan. The crucial step in creating a security system lies in defining its framework, which is why the authors of this study have chosen the perspective of regional collective security as a basis for their analysis.

The central focus governing the cooperative security model is that while the aforementioned factors have contributed to the formation of a conflict-driven security pattern in the Persian Gulf region, these factors also carry immense potential for establishing a regional regime founded on cooperation and interaction. This model offers the potential for achieving relative security through reciprocal commitments and limitations, despite the existing mistrust. In contrast to a standard security arrangement where only allies and friends participate, the cooperative security model operates under the assumption that even adversaries, despite distrust, can adopt similar self-imposed limitations on their actions, leading to mutually advantageous outcomes.

The cooperative security model also assumes that these legal and voluntary limitations will carry mutual benefits. In this model, security guarantees arise not through dominance, but rather by rendering untenable any options aimed at subjugating rivals. The cooperative security approach emphasizes fostering a

regional understanding of the interconnectedness of security while prioritizing mutual reassurance as a fundamental principle, thereby superseding deterrence-based approaches. Increasing such assurance can mitigate the security dilemma inherently embedded within realist power politics. This approach seeks to cultivate trust between regional governments through dialogue, negotiation, collaboration, and agreement.

In line with the first and second subsidiary hypotheses of the research, the analysis examines the internal, regional, and global levels that have jeopardized the regional security of countries. Social structures, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences, ideological conflicts and clashes, geopolitics, border and territorial disputes, security dependence, influence and power dynamics, conflicting perspectives, convergent regional groups, energy resources, and disputes over resource fields (particularly oil and gas), arms races, and anarchy are identified as factors influencing the formation of the security pattern in the Persian Gulf based on both micro and macro levels of analysis. Notably, these aforementioned factors possess the remarkable capacity to exert influences upon one another across different analytical levels. Comparing the factors influencing regional and trans-regional order patterns, the analysis initially delves into their specific modes and patterns of influence. In this context, two models of influence are considered: top-down and bottom-up. The bottom-up model refers to micro-mechanisms through which internal variables and dynamics from regional actors influence the regional order pattern. At this level, two variables - legitimacy and its associated crises - are examined alongside nation-state building. The analysis demonstrates how these two variables can manifest in various ways, contributing to the factors influencing the regional pattern as well as being considered trans-regional factors impacting the regional pattern through both analytical scales. Legitimacy crises, whether stemming from the lack of legitimacy itself or

the emergence of social movements seeking decentralization or systemic transformations, have the potential to induce significant changes within a regional security complex. Examples such as the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh region, in addition to events within Yemen, Syria, and even Saudi Arabia, illustrate how legitimacy crises can escalate and trigger regional instability. Furthermore, nation-state building is identified as another factor influencing regional security patterns. At its core, nation-states inherently encompass diverse ethnicities, races, and languages within their territories due to the nation-state-building process. This inherent diversity can disrupt their relationships with neighboring countries, influencing the dynamics between any two regional powers and consequently impacting the broader regional security complex. The conflict-ridden South Caucasus region over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, where ethnic Armenians reside within Azerbaijani borders, exemplifies such instances where ethnic groups belonging to one country reside within the territory of another, contributing to instability and disruptions in relations amongst countries as well as regional security patterns. Occasionally, a large ethnic group may find itself divided between two or more countries, further exacerbating political instability. The Kurdish population divided across Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria stands as a prominent example of this phenomenon within nation-state building.

The third subsidiary hypothesis of the research was as follows: It seems that Iran's initiative titled the Coalition of Hope (Hormuz Peace), which is based on the logic of endogenous security for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, represents a shift from the concept of purchasing security towards reliance on the people of the region and cooperation among them. This could provide a more suitable perspective for long-term peace and stability in the region. According to the findings of the research, Iran is a source of problems in this

established system with the aforementioned goals. Therefore, the establishment of Hormuz Peace is currently nothing more than a dream, and in this regard, our hypothesis is supported by reasons indicating that this security model, considering the internal nature of security and its formation by the countries of the region, offers a promising outlook for peace and security. However, if the Islamic Republic of Iran desires to establish an endogenous security model, it must first address the existing obstacles to institutional building and engage in confidence-building measures. Most importantly, the normalization of relations between Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates with Israel, as well as the formation of the Abraham Accords, have had the most significant negative impact on the establishment of Hormuz Peace up to the time of writing this research. It is also likely that in recent days, other members of the Cooperation Council may take steps to normalize relations with Israel. Thus, despite the importance of this initiative for security and stability in the region, its establishment is currently impossible, let alone its potential to bring about peace and stability, and it appears that insecurity continues to cast a shadow over the region.

In line with the fourth hypothesis, the examination of security frameworks such as the Nixon-Kissinger doctrine, dual containment policy, the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Arab NATO initiative indicates that trans-regional security patterns in the Persian Gulf are characterized by the United States' ongoing consolidation of its alliances in the region and the continued sale of arms based on an island security model, alongside support for the security of its allies and the perpetuation of an Iranophobia policy. Given that the Persian Gulf supplies 40 percent of the world's oil consumption, along with the critical importance of maritime security in this region and its position in the global economic and security puzzle, the security of the Persian Gulf has become significant for both regional and trans-regional countries, each seeking a model to establish security in the area. However, the presence of the United States in the Persian Gulf has consistently been that of an intervening actor, exerting a negative rather than a positive influence. As long as the occupying regime of Israel and the covetous gaze of trans-regional powers, particularly the United States, remain in this region, any attempt to establish a security order will face numerous challenges, and such a security order is unlikely to materialize in the long term. The existence of the Zionist regime, the presence of trans-regional powers, the rise of identity and ideological rivalries, distrust, and the conflicting interests of regional countries, along with the differing perspectives of key actors, have become some of the most significant obstacles to creating a collective security model in the Persian Gulf region.

Several strategies can be considered to implement a model of cooperative security in the Persian Gulf region. First, the strategy of demilitarization can be pursued through de-escalation, substitution, re-articulation, and either eliminating or silencing tensions. Second, if we regard foreign policy as a continuation of domestic policy and consider domestic policy to be derived from religious and national values, we can recognize the significance of religion, religious authorities, and religious rituals in any agenda, whether peaceful or hostile, in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In other words, religious institutions, including those related to pilgrimage (Hajj), play a decisive role in shaping political agendas in both countries. Third, what is assumed to be the foundation of a system based on security and collective cooperation, or at least what sustains the established links, is the issue of "building trust." Trust-building is the primary component of a grand strategy in creating a sustainable security model. We must initially and generally rely on dialogue and trust-building measures. Fourth, bilateral and multilateral mechanisms that can be supported by the United Nations should be established. This includes initiating peace negotiations aimed at resolving disputes among the countries in the region concerning

political, security, and environmental issues.

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