

American policy in Persian Gulf Region: Trump Presidency Continuity or Change

Parvin Neginraz¹

Abstract

United States power in Persian Gulf has risen since the end of Second World War. Dividing U.S. presence in the Region into the Cold war and post-Cold war era, the principle policy in first period was narrowing the impact of Soviet Union in the Region and in latter, Access to Persian Gulf region's oil and controlling the major threats which can disrupt the flow of oil to global energy market. Following the aforementioned policy by different president's continuity of U.S. policies in the Region is more than its changes. In this article after describing U.S. principle policy in the region, I will try to predict whether president Trump will follow the traditional policy framework or he will choose a different one. To do this I use Political Discourse Analysis method to analyze speeches and interviews of Trump about Middle East and Persian Gulf region after he took office. I conclude that Trump as well as all post-Cold War presidents of the U.S. will follow policies to make the Region stable considering strategic location of the region, export market of military equipment and goods, huge gas and oil reserves and Arab states role in oil market. Insisting on Peace Process and war against terrorism are among most important Trump strategies to stabilize the Region.

Key words: *America, Persian Gulf, Oil, Trump, Stability, Continuity*

Introduction

Persian Gulf region is important for world powers for its geopolitical aspects. (Pooraahmady & Hosseini Karami 2009:105) Geopolitical importance of the Persian Gulf is due to three factors of strategic location, export market of military equipment and goods, and huge oil and gas reserves. (Darvishi & Jalilvand 2010: 110)

Before the First World War, Persian Gulf Region Except for some countries was under the ruling of Ottoman Turks but after the War Britain assumed the control of Persian Gulf countries. (richman, 1985) By ending World War II and establishment of new divisions in the region and removal of colonial system, Britain left the region. Power vacuum in the Persian Gulf, the growing intention of United States to take leadership position in the world and paving more grounds for blooming economy of the country as well as start of the Cold War caused U.S. to define an important role for himself in the region.

Since then the Persian Gulf region has always been vital to the interests of the United States. The forward presence of U.S. military personnel and equipment in several of the Persian Gulf countries demonstrate the region's importance to U.S. policymakers and their commitment to its security and stability. (Hajjar 2002: III)

United States has used different military and less diplomatic efforts for a secure Persian Gulf Region since its dominance on the region. These efforts were made to fulfill two major

¹PhD student, Islamic Azad University South Tehran branch in International Relations,
Parvinneginraz2@yahoo.com

goals of United States; First to access Persian Gulf oil and the need to maintain the stable flow of that oil, and second to control major threats in the region which could disrupt the flow of Persian Gulf oil and potentially upset the global energy supply, affecting the economic stability of the United States. (Brew 2017) Different presidents of the country adopted different methods to exercise the mentioned strategy. So United States policy toward the region has always been continues besides little changes.

After president Donald Trump took the office some analysts described a changing U.S. with little interest in leadership of the world and more interested in internal issues. A new U.S. which looks at Middle East and its conflicts as a burden, interested at laying this burden down. A U.S. which is more interested in having trade issues with Middle East especially Persian Gulf states than security issues. Using Political Discourse Analysis method and by analyzing speeches and interviews of Trump about Middle East and Persian Gulf region I will answer to this question: “will president Trump follow the traditional policy framework of U.S. in the Persian Gulf region or he will choose a different one?” my hypothesis is that “Trump will follow his predecessors’ policies toward the region considering strategic location of the region, export market of military equipment and goods, huge gas and oil reserves and Arab states role in oil market.”

To answer the above mentioned question, I will discuss U.S. foreign policy trend in the Region aftermath of World War II, and will highlight the importance of some key variables in U.S. policy in the Region. In the next step I will analyze Trump speeches and statements about Middle East in general and Persian Gulf in Particular to extract his key policies that are very probable to be adopted by him in next 4 years.

Theoretical Framework: Political Discourse Analysis

“Discourse refers to how we think and communicate about people, things, the social organization of society, and the relationships among and between all three.” (Lisa Cole, 2017) “Each discourse rests on certain assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debate, agreement and disagreement about an object.” (Glynos et.al 2009:8) So Discourse Analysis has been one of the methods that Scientists in different fields use to analyze different phenomenon.

Political Discourse Analysis is a method political scientists use to make a language base analysis of different events. “One of the core goals of political discourse analysis is to seek out the ways in which language choice is manipulated for specific political effect.” “The essential issue in political discourse is... the balance between linguistic analysis and political analysis “(Wilson 2003:411)

As Van Dijk mentions political discourse is identified by its actors or authors. Most studies of political discourse are about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties. “Politicians in this sense are the group of people who are being paid for their (political) activities, and who are being elected or appointed as the central players in the politics”. (Van Dijk 1995: 11-12)

U.S. policy in Persian Gulf Region after World War II

After World War II the critical concern with U.S. politicians was finding an effective way to narrow Soviet expansion and influence throughout the world. In the Persian Gulf region, this meant preventing the Soviets from filling the power vacuum left by the end of Britain colonialism. The second interest was to maintain access to facilities, resources and strategic locations in this region. Vast petroleum reserves were another or to say most important interest. To achieve these main objectives, the United States developed two doctrines. First of them was to promote peace and stability, and the second was recruitment of partners in the region to help contain Soviet expansion. (Brew 2017)

To stabilize the region, U.S. tried to bring along States of the region with his security plans. The Eisenhower administration supported the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1956 as a security alliance involving Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, and the United Kingdom. The pact collapsed because of the Iraqi revolution of 1958. After Britain terminated its protectorate of the region in 1970, a real security vacuum was created. Because of the Vietnam experience, U.S. was not able to meddle in security equations of the Persian Gulf directly so it was forced to rely on the Shah of Iran to follow the Persian Gulf security policy. Collapse of the Shah in 1979 again forced U.S. to change its security policy in the region.(Hajjar 2002: 8) In general U.S. efforts to bring countries of the region under the U.S. security shelter and promote security in the region besides making real partnership with Arab states were not successful up to Iraq-Iran war.

“Dual Containment” was the new policy adopted by U.S. under the new security policy after revolution in Iran . Following Dual Containment during 1980s U.S. has tried to prolong the Iraq-Iran war to weaken the two countries and prevent anti-American new Government in Iran to dominate the region.

As a result of Dual Containment policy which has led to the prolonged Iraq-Iran war, Arab countries of the region decided to reinforce their power by establishing a coalition in close relationship with U.S.. So they have established Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to protect themselves from the increasing conflicts in the region. GCC was a starting point for U.S. to bring Arab countries of the region under the US security shelter and make a guaranteed partnership with them. “The International Relations of the Gulf Working Group Summary Report (2009)“counts U.S.- GCC relation objectives as follows;

U.S. - GCC relations is based on military, diplomatic, and alliance building. The US has been the GCC's primary defender since the 1980s and is also the primary supplier of weapons and military technology to the GCC. This strategy is limited due to internal Islamic opposition, fierce criticism from surrounding states, and the presence of American installations..²

The GCC-U.S. partnership is alliance between a stronger party and a weaker party. In such alliances there will always be "the tension between fears of entrapment and abandonment" on the part of the weaker party. Recognizing its weakness, it always fears that the stronger party is not taking adequate account of its interests. This can explain much of the tension between the United States and its GCC partners. (Shayji 2016)

²International Relations of Gulf Report.P. 7.

After Iraq-Iran war and occupation of Kuwait by Iraq, the United States military presence in the region was emphasized by Arab countries of the region and agreements on bilateral defense cooperation between U.S. and Persian Gulf Arab countries were signed. These agreements provide U.S. access to military bases and facilities of countries to the Region (Darvishi&Jalilvand 2010: 115). Besides U.S. have done necessary planning for training, organizing, and improvements of the military forces in the Persian Gulf allied countries (Mottaghi, 1998:197).

The significance of U.S. arms transfers to the region becomes apparent when one finds that the United States gave or sold more arms to the Middle East, especially Persian Gulf Arab countries, than all other arms exporters combined. Weapons and their delivery systems are America's number one export to the Middle East, totaling nearly one-third of all exports to the region. (zunes 2003)

After collapse of Soviet Union and changes in the regional equations, the focus of U.S. policy in the region has dramatically changed from Soviet influence in the Region as the first priority to oil access and security.

Oil security in Persian Gulf with having one third of globally traded oil, and half of the world's crude oil, passes through a single narrow waterway at the eastern end of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, which is controlled by Islamic Republic of Iran have become the first priority policy of U.S. policy makers. This will clearly explains why the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain, along with a force of five thousand marines. Why the Al Udeid Air Base in Doha, Qatar is home to nine thousand US servicemen, while another thirteen thousand are stationed in Kuwait. (Brew 2017)

What so ever policy U.S. has followed in the region since the end of Cold War from backing Peace process-between the Zionist Regime and Palestinians, development and democracy building initiatives, energy security initiatives and even battle against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are all to access Persian Gulf region's oil and energy security. As it was described in The White House, A National Security Strategy for Global Age:

The United States has enduring interests in pursuing a just, lasting, and comprehensive Middle East peace, ensuring the security and well-being of Israel, helping our Arab partners provide for their security, and maintaining worldwide access to a critical energy source. Our strategy reflects those interests . . .³

Trump Policy in Persian Gulf

In this section I will try to predict Donald Trump's strategy in Persian Gulf by analyzing 21 of his speeches and interviews in which he has talked about Middle East or Persian Gulf using Political Analysis Method.

Middle East is a region of special importance to Trump from an economic point of view. As he remarks:

...we want to get back to running our great country -- jobs. Trade deficits, we want them to disappear fast. North Korea, a big problem. Middle East, a big problem. So that's what I am focused on...⁴

³The White House, A National Security Strategy For A Global Age, December 2000, p. 58.

Donald Trump has articulated his administration foreign policy in the Region in his “Foreign Policy Speech” as follows:

...In the Middle East our goals must be... to defeat terrorists and promote regional stability, not radical change. .. we have groups that no matter what you do, they will be the enemy.: We have to be smart enough to recognize who those groups are... and not help them.... Although not in government service, I was totally against the war in Iraq, very proudly, saying for many years that it would destabilize the Middle East...⁵

Since the end of the Second World War ,the U.S. has seen its commitment to the stability of the Gulf region.as Palmer says“Washington’s policies in the area is the expression of a principle strategy aimed at ensuring the energy needs of the US besides reduction of the risk for instability and disruptions in the global oil market – since global oil shocks would inevitably have negative effects on fuel prices at the pump in the US.” (Palmer 1992: 51)

Trump first priority as a businessman is to save more and spend less. In regard with Middle East in general and Persian Gulf region in particular implication of this priority is vivid. As a businessman he clearly understands the importance of Middle East especially Persian gulf region for the stability of U.S. market- in regard with oil market- so he defines his first priority in the region making peace to build stability. The same policy priority has been followed by different U.S. presidents after World War II. As he has mentioned in his Paris Climate Accord exit speech:

... We’re working very hard for peace in the Middle East, and perhaps even peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.⁶

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has mentioned to the peace in the Middle East (directly or indirectly) 36 times.

As far as Trump is in search of a stable Middle East to fulfill its economic ambitious in the Region especially in Persian Gulf Arab countries, reviving Peace Process is supposed to be one of his main objectives. In the Israel Museum he introduces U.S. objective for peace process as follows:

I am truly hopeful that America can help Israel and the Palestinians forge peace... I also firmly believe that if Israel and the Palestinians can make peace, it will begin a process of peace all throughout the Middle East...⁷

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has mentioned to the Peace Process (directly or indirectly) 17 times.

Meddling directly in conflicts of the Region or providing money to different countries and groups will not be Trump’s choice to bring peace to the region. In other word he does not believe on U.S. playing the role of police in the region, because he believes that this will burden too much expense to U.S. economy and makes the Region more unstable. He has stated this strategy in remarks to the meeting with the National Governors Association:

⁴Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a Joint Press Conference

⁵Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy Speech

⁶Trump’s Paris Climate Accord exit speech

⁷Remarks by Trump and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Joint Statements

*But where we are... almost 17 years of fighting in the Middle East. I saw a chart ... as of about a month ago, \$6 trillion we've spent in the Middle East ... And I want to tell you, that's just unacceptable. And we're nowhere. Actually, if you think about it, we're less than nowhere. The Middle East is far worse than it was 16, 17 years ago. There's not even a contest... It's a mess like you've never seen before... So we're going to straighten it out.*⁸

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has mentioned not to interfere directly in wars in the Middle East (directly or indirectly) 15 times. This 15 times has been mostly in the form of referring to great amount of money that has been wasted in the wars in the Region and making the region more instable meddling in those wars.

Following the aforementioned policy in his speech in Saudi Arabia, Trump has clearly expressed the role U.S. is going to play in Middle East Terrorism problem:

*Terrorism has spread across the world... America is prepared to stand with you -- in pursuit of shared interests and common security. But the nations of the Middle East cannot wait for American power to crush this enemy for them. The nations of the Middle East will have to decide what kind of future they want for themselves...*⁹

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has referred to terrorism in the Middle East (directly or indirectly) 19 times. He has insisted on War against terrorism to make the region stable, but his strategy is to besiege Arab states of the Region to pay for it. Trump believes that instead of putting too much burden on U.S. shoulders, the government of these countries should lead and bear the expenditures of such a project themselves. As far as the only states that can afford this and are friends of U.S. in the region are Persian Gulf Arab States, he tries to make a critical role for them in this issue. This policy can be understood from Trump's different remarks.

*... our partners must meet their financial obligations. And now, based on our very strong and frank discussions, they are beginning to do just that. In fact, I can tell you, the money is pouring in. We expect our partners ... the Middle East... to take a direct and meaningful role in both strategic and military operations, and pay their fair share of the cost.*¹⁰

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has mentioned Role of Arab states in war against terrorism (directly or indirectly) 4 times.

As it was mentioned Trump doesn't want another war in the region but for selling more weapons to rich Arab countries and to control Islamic Republic of Iran he tries to stimulate regional disputes between IRI and Arab countries. For example in his speech in Saudi Arabia he says:

But no discussion of stamping out this threat would be complete without mentioning the government that gives terrorists all three—safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment. It is a regime that is responsible for so much instability in the region. I am speaking of course of Iran.

In 21 transcripts of different speeches and interviews trump has talked about Iran (directly or indirectly) 16 times as supporter of terrorists in the Region and destabilizer of the Region.

⁸President Trump in Meeting with the National Governors Association

⁹Transcript of Trump's speech in Saudi Arabia

¹⁰Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress

Conclusion

U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region is divided into two main eras with Soviet Union collapse as the turning point. Although the main U.S national interest has not changed but priorities and the way to fulfill this national interest was different. Access to grand oil reserves in the region and oil transition and price security were the two continuous policies after collapse of Soviet Union. Both aforementioned policies to be accomplished need the region to be stable.

Trump's general policy is to save more money for U.S. to fulfill his economic related promises like making more Jobs. To accomplish this, Middle East region is of especial importance to him from four dimensions. First being home to half of world oil reserves; second, being the export market of military equipment and goods; third Arab states role in oil market; fourth, cutting U.S. military expenditures for bringing stability in the Region, and satisfying Arab Persian Gulf countries to pay for the Regions stability. Except for the last strategy which has been employed differently the three other are the same as former U.S. administrations.

The main policies which is supposed to be followed by Trump administration based on his remarks analysis is to promote regional stability through settling the ground for Peace Process and defeating terrorists with money of Persian Gulf Countries. He is not pro radical changes and war in the Region because he believes this will destabilize the region which is not in the U.S. interest. He only tries to sell more weapons to Arab states by stimulating rivalries especially between I.R.I and other countries. He also tries not to meddle in Middle East wars directly.

So we can conclude that that Trump as well as all post-Cold War presidents of the U.S. will follow policies to make the Region stable considering strategic location of the region, export market of military equipment and goods, huge gas and oil reserves and Arab states role in oil market.

References

- Al Barasneh Ayman Saleh (2015), *United States Foreign Policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC) 2001-2008: Searching for Stable Security Framework*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester, Department of Politics and International Relations University of Leicester.
- Al Shaayji Abdullah (2016), *The GCC-U.S. Relationship: A GCC Perspective*, <http://mepc.org/gcc-us-relationship-gcc-perspective>.
- Beaver Bobby, Beaver Jeffrey, Wilsey Matthew (1999), *The Middle East: United States Policy and Relations in the Latter Half of the 20th Century* https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war_peace/middleeast/hcentury.html
- Brew Greg (2017), *America and the Persian Gulf - The Case for Dropping the Carter Doctrine* <http://www.metsociety.org/debate-foreign-policy/dropping-the-carter-doctrine>.
- Darvishi Farhad and Jalilvand Ameneh (2010), *Impacts of U.S. Military Presence in the Arabic Countries of Persian Gulf: Security Shield or Reduce of Legitimacy*. *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Volume: 6, No 4, Winter PP 167-180.
- Glynos Jason, Howarth David, Norval Aletta, Speed Ewen (2009), *Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods*, National Center for Research Methods.
- Hajjar Sami G. (2002), *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Changing and Prospects*, Strategic Studies Institute, united states.

- Lisa Cole Nicki (2017), *What is Discourse? A Sociological Definition*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/discourse-definition-3026070>.
- Mottaghi, Ebrahim (1998), *America's Foreign Political Developments, Intervention and Expand*, Tehran, Center of Documents of Islamic Revolution.
- Nami, M.Hassan and Alireza Abasi (2009), *Analysis of Iran Geo-economics Position in the Middle East*, *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol:5, No 2, Autumn.
- Palmer Michael A. (1992), *Guardians of the Gulf. A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992*, New York: The Free Press.
- Poorahmady, Hossein and S.R.Hosseini Karani (2009), *The Geopolitics of the Oil-rich Countries of the Persian Gulf and Defiance of Globalization*, *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol:5, No1, Spring & Summer.
- Richman Sheldon L. (1985) *Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 46: The United States and the Persian Gulf*, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/united-states-persian-gulf>
- Van Dijk Teun A. (1995), *What is Political Discourse Analysis?*, In Jan Blommaert & Chris Bulcaen (Eds.), *Political linguistics*. (pp. 11-52). Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1997
- Wilson John (2003), *Political Analysis, The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Willey Publication 2003. P: 398-411.
- Yette Steve A. (2016), *Misperceiving U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf: Raising the Hidden Costs of U.S. Dependence on Oil*, <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/misperceiving-u-s-foreign-policy-gulf-raising-hidden-costs-u-s-dependence-oil>
- Zunes Stephen (2003), *U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism*, Common Courage Press, 2003, paper, www.palestine-studies.org/jps/fulltext/41389.
- *The International Relations of the Gulf Working Group Summary Report, 2009 Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.*
- Ibrahim Nader, Nasur Bani (2016), *The United States and the Security of the Arab Gulf States*, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 6, No. 11; November.
- *The White House, A National Security Strategy For A Global Age, December 2000.*
- *Transcript of Trump's speech in Saudi Arabia*, www.memorandum.com/170521/p27
- *Remarks by President Trump on Agricultural Innovation*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/22/remarks-president-trump-agricultural-innovation-cedar-rapids-ia>
- *Remarks by President Trump on Regulatory Relief*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/09/remarks-president-trump-regulatory-relief>
- *Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a Joint Press Conference*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/09/remarks-president-trump-and-president-iohannis-romania-joint-press>.
- *Transcript: President Donald Trump's Paris Climate Accord exit speech* <http://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/transcript-trump-paris-climate-accord-exit-speech/>
- *Remarks by President Trump at NATO Unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall Memorials - Brussels, Belgium*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/25/remarks-president-trump-nato-unveiling-article-5-and-berlin-wall>
- *Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/23/remarks-president-trump-israel-museum>
- *Remarks by President Trump and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Joint Statements*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/23/remarks-president-trump-and-president-abbas-palestinian-authority-joint>
- *Transcript: President Donald Trump's Interview With Bloomberg News*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-01/president-donald-trump-interviewed-by-bloomberg-news-transcript>
- *Donald Trump in his own words - Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/9ae777ea-17ac-11e7-a53d-df09f373be87?mhq5j=e1>

- *Remarks by President Trump and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan in Joint Press Conference, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/05/remarks-president-trump-and-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-jordan-joint>*
- *Partial Transcript: Trump's Interview With The Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/us/politics/donald-trump-interview-new-york-times-transcript.html>*
- *Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/28/remarks-president-trump-joint-address-congress>*
- *Remarks by President Trump in Meeting with the National Governors Association, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/27/remarks-president-trump-meeting-national-governors-association>*
- *Transcript: Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Speech, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html>*
- *Speech: Donald Trump in Sioux City, IA - November 6, 2016*
- *Speech: Donald Trump in Tampa, FL - November 5, 2016*
- *Speech: Donald Trump in Wilmington, OH - November 4, 2016*
- *Speech: Donald Trump in Grand Rapids, MI - October 31, 2016*
- *Speech: Donald Trump Delivers a Speech on Infrastructure - Cincinnati, OH - June 7, 2017*
- *Speech: Donald Trump in Pensacola, FL - November 2, 2016*