Shift in the Relationship of Power of Actors in the Persian Gulf

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Abstract

Objective: This article examines how has the Iraq War changed the balance of power and the relationship of power among the different actors in the Persian Gulf region? Different avenues of research have shed light on the relationship of power in the region among the regional states. However, this article explores the relationship between the Iraq War and the shift in the power of the states and transnational actors in the region.

Method: Margaret Levi's analytic narratives methodology (2002) is applied in this article to first, extract the actors, their goals, their preferences and the rules that influence their behavior. Second, a shift in equilibrium at one point in time that produces new outcomes at a different point of time is identified. Third, constraints and incentives by narrating the sequences and processes of events are explored.

Results: The article explores: first, the period between 2000 and 2003, the three polarity powers of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia were balanced by the United States (US). This is a continuation of the balance of power policy that dominated in the region during the past decades. Second, between 2004 and 2011, a security shift changed the distribution of power among the small and great regional states, the US and the transnational actors in the Persian Gulf.

Conclusion: The findings, hence, indicate more heterogeneous and multi-angular actors are exercising power in the region, such as the small state of Qatar. The transnational actor, not only now exercises power in the region but they are also threatening regional states.

Key words: Analytic Narratives, Balance of Power, Distribution of Power, Iran, Pazhak, Transnational Actors and USA.

1. Introduction

This article examines how the 2003 Iraq War has changed balance of power relationship of actors in the Persian Gulf region. The Middle East region is a place where autonomous regional level of security has operated strongly for several decades. The Middle East is an example of a conflict formation that also possesses some distinctive cultural features. Insecurity of ruling elites within their domestic sphere plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of insecurity overall. Definition of Middle East varies but a pattern of security interdependence is seen that covers a region stretching from Morocco to Iran (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 187). In the Middle East, the Persian Gulf region emerges as one of the most pivotal because of its conflict formation, post-colonial modern states, cultural and religious features together with the autonomous regional level of security and numerous threats over several decades. The two Persian Gulf Wars, the Iran and Iraq War, the Kuwait invasion by Iraq represent the conflictual environment in the region from 1979 to 2003 (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 5).

The importance of the 2003 Iraq War, however, is perhaps based on the shift in the internal transformation of security in the region, which expanded the possibilities for security studies more than before during other points in time, such as in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet, the analysis in this article is concentrated on the shift in the relationship of power among the different actors in the region in the aftermath of the Iraq War. The power of the regional states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Bahrain (the so-called states of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)), Iran and Iraq), the US, and transnational actors in the Persian Gulf has thus far been examined in several studies (Kamrava, 2011: 184-190; Ulrichsen, 2011: 67-69). With close consideration, Henner Fürtig mapped the relationship of power among the main regional states and the US. Fürtig provided a detailed analysis of the relationship of power in the region from the 1980s to 2006. However, the analysis was limited to the great regional states – Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – and the balancing of their power by the US.

Although Fürtig noted that "the 2003 Iraq War has created an entirely new situation" (Fürtig, 2007: 519, for more recent discussions see, Ulrichsen ed., 2017, 113-127) in the region, he does not discuss about other regional actors, such as the transnational actor of Pazhak, and the small state such as Qatar in his analysis. This article contributes to Fürtig's analysis by including these other actors in the examination of the relationship of power because of the part they play in shedding light on the shift that relationship since the Iraq War. In so doing, the findings of this article enhance Fürtig's contribution. Moreover, adopting adequate theoretical and methodological approaches assists in analysis of the

relationship of power in the region and contributes to new findings (see below).

This article poses one main question: *How has the Iraq War changed the balance of power and the relationship of power among the different actors in the Persian Gulf?* The next part of this article discusses the methodological approach as the Margaret Levi's analytic narratives to examine the distribution of power in the Persian Gulf. The second section discusses the balance of power among the great regional states between 2000 and 2003. In the third section, the changes in the relationship of power among the regional actors are analyzed between 2004 and 2011. The discussion concludes by indicating how is the structure of the relationship of power in the region, as well as providing a constellation of the multiple-actors exercising power in the region.

2. Research Methodology: Margaret Levi's Analytic Narratives

In this article, the analytic narratives method is chosen to examine the relationships of power among the regional states in the Persian Gulf in relation to the Iraq War. It involves selecting a problem or puzzle, then building a model to explicate the logic and sequences of an explanation for a problem in the context of the unique case.

Levi's analytic narratives has three key steps: *first*, to extract the actors, their goals, their preferences and the rules that influence their behavior (the actors are discussed in the theoretical framework, see below). *Second*, a shift in equilibrium at one point in time that produces new outcomes at a different point of time is identified. *Third*, analytic narratives reveal constraints and incentives by narrating the sequences and processes of events (Levi 2002, 108-128).

Regarding to the first key step in the Levi's method – actors – in the context of the Persian Gulf, vary from the GCC states, Iran and Iraq to the external ones such as the US and transnational actors such as Pazhak, a transnational terrorist group along the western border of Iran. They have power in the region and power refers to any capacity that allows an entity to act effectively or encompass the ability to influence other actors in the region. In this sense, power constitutes hard, soft, military and political power and defense ability. In discussing power, it as an adjunct concept to the neo-realist perspective which rests on power and polarity. The neo-realist interpretation of post-Iraq War security assumes that there is a change of power in the region and the concern is to identify the evolution of that change to understand various security outcomes (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 6, 11). Thus, the concept behind power addresses the interaction among actors and how their security threats interrelate and threaten each other in the same security context (Ibid. 45-55).

Buzan and Wæver used polarity, which is close to neo-realism and is defined by the power of the regional actors. Polarity in this article refers to the manners, including bi-polarity, tri-polarity and multi-polarity in which power is distributed among the regional actors. Thus, concepts such as balance of power, distribution of power and relationship of power in the analytical sections refer to polarity and regional actors' influence and power in the Persian Gulf. The polarity perspectives before and after the Iraq War are in contrast to one another (Buan and Wæver 2003, 30-32). Fürtig referred to the tri-polarity power composed of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq and the balance of their power by the US from 1980 to 2003. However, the Iraq War challenged this system, and a multi-polarity of power reigned in the region (Fürtig 2007, 631).

Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde also built on securitization by referring to processes within the political community that treat something as an existential threat to an object and calls for an exceptional measure. I apply it to examine how one state perceives another state's as a threat and calls for urgent measures. More specifically, the rise of power of transnational actors, namely Pazhak, forces regional states, specifically Iran, to announce it as a threat. Therefore, the Iraq War shepherded in a shift where not only the states persuade other states to securitize, but the transnational actors also act as motivators of securitization. Within this arrangement, three elements are affiliated: those who alert the region to the threat, those who have been threatened, and the nature of the threat (Buzan ET. Al, 1998: 36).

What is problematic with this characterization is that it dismissed the importance of the evaluators of threats. Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert conceptualize the relationship between those who alert the region to the threat and those who evaluate the threat. For them, those who evaluate the threat must agree with the claims made by those who alert the region to the threat. They vary from members of the ruling elites or members of the parliaments to the public in the form of moral support (Léonard and Kaunert, 2011: 60-65).

Regarding to the second key step in the Levi's method - a shift in equilibrium at one point in time - the shift is determined to have taken place throughout the 2003 Iraq War and changed the distribution of power among the actors in the Persian Gulf. In relation to the third step - narrating the sequences and processes of events - I identify the appropriate sequencing concerning the relationship of power in the region and the specifics of the shift that happened. In this article, I examine diagnostic pieces of evidence within a case supporting an alternative explanatory hypothesis. In this article, the Iraq War made the shift in the distribution of power among the regional actors. To examine this social phenomenon, such as an interaction between actors in a social context is proposed

(Checkel, 2008: 115), I suggest *'power has been distributed among the regional states, the transnational actors and the US since the Iraq War'*.

I establish a causes B through c, d and e processes. My address of 'c, d and e processes' leads the discussion to sequencing of the processes to represent the interaction among actors during the specific time. I further note that the mechanism connecting A to B through c, d and e processes may be worked backwards from observed outcomes to the potential causes as well as forward to facilitate change and find new outcomes (Bennett, 2010: 208-209). There are various ways of finding the processes, although I use the sequence of time to connect one process to another. Hence, the analyses presented cover the period between 2000 and 2011 (Bennett, 2010: 210-211).

Viewed in this way, two processes are suggested in this article. I examine the period between 2000 and 2003 to investigate the tri-polarity power of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. I then look at the period between 2004 and 2011 to evaluate the hypothesis 'power has been distributed among the regional states, the transnational actors and the US'. The net benefit of analytic narratives, hence, is to elucidate the analysis based on what has taken place in terms of distribution of power among the regional actors, how it has taken place, what shift was made, and how those actors interact after the Iraq War.

With regard to the fact that analytic narratives operate mainly with qualitative data, I utilize both primary and secondary data. The primary data includes interviews with regional and American experts, analysts and scholars.[7] The additional primary documents are statements and speeches of the state representatives, drawn from public US Government and United Nations sources. Secondary data comes from existing academic literature as well as local news networks such as the Kabar Online and Mashregh News Agency in Iran.

According to the explanation above, the innovation of this article is that applying the analytic narratives method (2002) by Margareti Levi facilitates the study of the relationship of power among the actors in the Persian Gulf. First, it is suggested a set of actors whose interactions pose threats to other actors in the same region. It is explained how transnational actors has become an existential threat to the regional states since the Iraq War. Therefore, the proposed toolbox for this article attempts to map the broad picture of how the different regional actors interact in the region since the Iraq War and the way in which different actors exercise power on one another. Moreover, the analytic narratives method opens up an option to study the interrelationship between the Iraq War and the distribution of power of actors in the region. Thus, these steps are

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7.Interviews are utilized anonymously in this article due to the agreement with the interviewees.

understood within the proposed processes by looking at the period before the Iraq War, since 2000, to the aftermath of the Iraq War up until 2011.

In the following section, I will examine the Levi's analytic narratives by including it into the two processes (see above) among the power relationship of the actors in the Persian Gulf security context.

3. Results and Discussions on the Shift in the Relationship of Power of Actors in the Persian Gulf

To examine the mechanism of the interrelationship between the Iraq War and the shift in the relationship of power in the Persian Gulf region, first investigates the process from 2000 to 2003 and what pattern of distribution of power dominated in the region at the same time. Owing to the fact that my main concern is to study the security shift in the power of regional actors since the Iraq War, I will not attempt to analyze the details of US policy of dual containment in the period between 2000 and 2003.

3-1. Looking Backwards: Balance of Power of Saudi Arabia and Iran vs. Iraq

Before proceeding further, it is important to convey that the first period between 2000 and 2003 was a continuation of the power relationship existing among the main regional states from the 1980s to 2000 (For example see, Fürtig, 2007: 78). Thus, for the two decades, the balance of power policy was persistent in the region, and the US balanced the power of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq. The examination of the period between 2000 and 2003 indicates that balancing the power between Iran and Saudi Arabia vs. Iraq caused status quo in the region with two strands. The US administration applied the policy of dual containment to, first, balance Iranian power by pushing it into isolation and imposing economic sanctions and, second, to securitize the threat of Saddam and the launch of the Iraq War in 2003.

3-1-1. Iran's Containment

Iran's partial rapprochement with the GCC states and offering of a security context in the region with the presence of the US motivated the securitizing action of the US administration toward Iran. By looking at the Briefing before the First Session of the One Hundred Tenth Congress, Tom Lantos — the Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs – stated:

Among the highest priority for the US is creating a long term strategy toward Iran. The threats posed to the US by Iran have been clear for decades… The line in sand was first drawn in 1979 when Iranian revolutionaries took over our embassy (Ros-Lehtinen, 2007: 5).

Based on the statement by Tom Lantos and ensuing action, emergency measures were taken to impose US sanctions on Iran; this action was also representative of the enmity relationship between the two countries. During the period between 2000 and 2003, the US Department of Treasury reported three types of sanctions on Iran (United States Department of Treasury 2013). The activities of the Department of Labor in 2000 indicated the prohibition of any US assistance, export assistance and credit and guarantee for export to Iran (United States Department of Treasury, 2000: 7201). Moreover, the US Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control in 2001 acknowledged that all contested and non-contingent liabilities and property interests of the government of Iran, its agencies, instrumentalities and controlled entities in possession or control of the US people were subject to jurisdiction (Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control 2001, 38554).

In the 2003 document of the Department of Treasury, the scope of sanctions on Iran was developed, and any export and re-exportation of oil imports, petroleum and petroleum products were restricted (Department of Treasury, 2003: 11742). Taken together, the containment of Iran was limited to isolation and economic sanctions, and no evidence was found that the US pursued a plan to overthrow the Iranian government. This is in contrast to the viewpoint of the Bush administration concerning Saddam (see below).

3-1-2. Threat of the Iraq Government

The second strand of the US policy of dual containment relates to Iraq and the way in which they challenged US interest in the region several times during this period. The threat included the alleged development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and a link to the Al Qaeda organization. Thus, these factors caused a shift in the US strategy in the region. The importance of this period is evident in both the Iraq containment and in the viewpoint of the Bush administration about Saddam's leadership, which led to the decision to attack Iraq in 2003. President Bush linked Iraq and Saddam to an existential threat by alleging the presence of WMDs and a tie to Al Qaeda:

In Iraq, a dictator is building and hiding weapons that could enable him to dominate the Middle East and intimidate the civilized world -- and we will not allow it. This same tyrant has close ties to terrorist organizations, and could supply them with the terrible means to strike this country -- and America will not permit it. The danger posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons cannot be ignored or wished away… we are prepared to disarm Iraq by force (Bush 2003).

The statement by George Bush not only points out the nature of constructing Saddam as the enemy, but it also calls for a number of actions in a straightforward manner. In April 2003, Colin Powell − former

US Secretary of State – concluded that the cooperation between Iraq and Al Qaeda made a nexus that combined Al Qaeda, a classic terrorist organization, to the modern methods of murdering (Powell, 2003). The Central Intelligence Counterterrorism Center was aggressively seeking to make a connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq. Gause acknowledges that a number of reports came from foreign governments and Iraqi opposition groups about the relationship between Iraq and Al Qaeda. The major evidence was identified as the presence of Abu Musa Al Zarqawi, the Al Qaeda member － in Iraq before the 2003 war. The intelligence community concluded that Saddam had knowledge of the presence of Abu Mus'ab Al Zarqawi in Iraq (Gause, 2010: 210-212). After the 2003 debacle of the Saddam's government, Al-Zarqawi, mobilized his network to Iraq to conduct acts of terror against the US, Iran and Shia communities in the Persian Gulf region (Shayan 2017, 150-151).

Despite this report, the Central Intelligence Agency did not conclude that there was a connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq. With the failed securitizing move by President Bush, the alleged securitization of Iraq WMDs came into the political spotlight. In an interview with British journalists in April 2002, President Bush recalled that "I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go. That is about all I am willing to share with you" (President Bush quoted in Robbins and Cummings, 14 June 2002).

Quickly, some of the American public accepted the claim of Iraq WMDs. The World Public Opinion survey supports the idea that half of the American people believed that Iraq had WMDs when the US attacked Iraq in 2003 (World Public Opinion, 2006, for more recent opinions see also, Butt 2019, 250-285). Moreover, the Selected Committee on Intelligence in the US Senate reported that Dick Cheney － the then US Vice President － claimed that "many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons very soon" (Cheney, 2002). This consensus between the US leaders and people increased the possibility of a physical war in Iraq in 2003. In February 2002, George Bush ordered the CIA to undertake a comprehensive covert program to topple Saddam, who was suspected to have plotted the development of WMDs and use nerve gas against national publics and neighbouring states such as Iran in the war. On 29 August 2002, President Bush approved the goals, objectives and strategy of the military plan for the Iraq War (Gause, 2010: 192-195).

After the containment of Iraq and Iran by the US, there was a period of a strong presence of Americans in the region. The US also supported the GCC states against the threat of Iraq and Iran. That led to a decade of military arrangements between Iraq and the US (Interview with a Kuwaiti professor on the security in the Persian Gulf 2**,** June 2018). A few references to the US military power in the region were made by the Quadrennial Defense Review Report in the US Department of Defense in 2001. The Secretary of Army explored options for enhancing ground force

capabilities in the region, and the Secretary of the Air Force developed plans to increase contingency basing in the Persian Gulf by ensuring sufficient fuel supplies. On the contrary, the Secretary of Navy shifted some of the Marine Corps prepositioned equipment from the Mediterranean Sea toward the Persian Gulf to be more responsive to contingencies (United States Department of Defense, 2001: 27).

3-2. Looking Forwards: Change in the Relationship of Power of Actors

In contrast to the previous period, where there was a balance of power, the period from 2004 to 2011 analyzes how the Iraq War caused a security shift in the distribution of power among the regional actors. This period contains evidence that since the Iraq War, the great regional states – Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – are not the only actors exercising power in the region. Rather, the transnational actor of Pazhak - the terrorist group along the western border of Iran - and the small GCC state - Qatar - have exercised power. I project in this period from the hypothesis 'power has been distributed among the regional states, the US and transnational actors in Persian Gulf since the Iraq War' (see above) to uncover new outcomes that represent the security shift in the relationship of power among the actors.

3-2-1. Rising Tensions between Iran and the US

The rising tensions between Iran and the US over power supremacy in the Persian Gulf region and Iranian nuclear energy capabilities indicate one aspect of the security shift in the distribution of power. Since 2003, the US has attempted to sideline Iranian power and preserve security balance in the region. The Iranian strategy has been to contest US interests in the region and resist the American regional order (Lynch, 2011: 14). In this spirit, the then Head of International Studies in a Gulf Center in the Persian Gulf interviewee states that the US had less of a position of a regional superpower but slowly moved toward this position when it arrived in the Persian Gulf in the 1970s. He states that the US will take a less active role in the Persian Gulf and place more emphasis on the GCC states and the type of government that comes into power in Iraq (Interview with the then head of international studies in a Gulf center in the Persian Gulf 1, August 2018). The analysis in this article does not necessarily support the claim that the US will take less of a position than before; yet, it agrees that Iran has challenged the US in the region since the Iraq War.

 Discussing the recent tensions between Iran and the US, Barzegar states that these countries have been competing with each other to enhance their power in the region since 2003. From the viewpoint of Iran (and the US), what one considers security enhancement is perceived as unsecure by the other side (Barzegar, 2010: 74-76; for a recent discussion see, Kheirandish and Moradi 2017, 675-85). Looking at the enmity relationship between

these countries, from the viewpoint of the Obama administration, Iran's progress with nuclear energy threatens the security of the neighbouring states and the US interests in the region (Ibid. 74-75). Iran disagrees with this viewpoint and simultaneously adopts a strategy to counter the US threat by holding several Iranian military manoeuvers in the Persian Gulf and western borders. This observation is supported by, for example, Iran's military manoeuver on its western border, which encompassed four days of war games to test the ability of military units to react in the case of an attack (Voice of America, 18 November 2011).

The rise of Iran's nuclear energy capability is interpreted as an indication of the shift of power in the region. President Bush has strongly stated that this is perceived as a security threat:

Look, Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. And the best way to ensure that the world is peaceful in the future is for the international community to continue to work together to say to the Iranians, we're going to isolate you (Bush 2007).

The US call for urgent measures, such as imposing sanctions and putting the military force agenda on the table, have not prevented Iran from continuing to develop nuclear energy. Yet, the Iranian development of nuclear energy has forced the GCC states into an arms race, which carries the threat to plentiful opportunities for unpredictable conflicts and regional polarization (Lynch, 2011: 24). Such voices in the GCC states have been heard, as with Prince Turki Al−Faisal − Chief of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies − states in a speech that he "supports the idea of [Persian] Gulf countries acquiring WMDs if Israel and Iran do not roll back their nuclear programs" (Turki Al Faisal, 2011). To support the GCC states against the threat of the Iranian nuclear energy program, the GCC leaders, as one of the audiences, have intensified their security alliance, with US Secretary of State during that period, Hillary Clinton promising at the security umbrella:

The United States would protect its allies in the Gulf from Iranian aggression, a pledge that echoed the notion of a "security umbrella". The United States already supplies defensive weapons to several of these countries, and is prepared to bolster its military assistance if needed (Clinton 2010).

In relation to the Iraq War, this evidence represents the security changes in the distribution of power between Iran and the US. The US is not considered to be the balancer of power in Iran, rather it is seen as a penetrating power that must Iran challenge it. The hostility between the US and Iran has been increasing since the Iraq War, and Iran remains the persistent securitized issue for the US.

3-2-2. Rise of Qatar's Soft Power

The rise of Qatar's soft power manifests a further indication of the shift of power since the Iraq War. Qatar possesses soft power and competes with Saudi Arabia, which is large in size, population and has been the custodian of the Holy Mosques. Since the 2003 debacle of Saddam's government, Saudi Arabia refocused on Qatar to influence its border and influence into the small states in the Persian Gulf region (Fromherz 2017, 96). Sheikh Hamad – the Emir of Qatar – has challenged Saudi Arabian power by maintaining a close relationship with the US (Saif, 2007: 104). This represents the magnitude of how internal rivalry is increasing among the GCC states. Kamrava notes that Qatar relies on the US and has become a location for US air bases. The power of Qatar, hence, is captured in their new self-confidence as it further influences the international relations of the region. An example of this is how they use diplomacy to mediate conflicts in the region and to contain Iranian and Saudi Arabian power (Kamrava, 10 March 2009).

Qatar, with the world's highest liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and a balanced foreign policy, has cultivated a growing international reputation for diplomatic mediation. Remembering that the regional states possess vast energy resources, the importance of Qatar's energy is in providing sufficient soft power to ensure strategic diplomatic ties with key countries and exercise diplomatic mediations. For example, Emir Hamad has gradually succeeded in establishing himself as 'Arab Henry Kissinger' and being recognized a primary interlocutor on the diplomatic scene (Fromm 2019, 62-65). Such growth has made Qatar 'a diplomatic power' albeit a soft power (Wright, 2009: 16-17). Qatar has functioned as a mediator in some major international conflicts such as the opening of an office in Doha for negotiations between the Taliban and the US (Al Shebeeb, 18 January 2012). The evidence concurs with Ulrichsen's perspective by suggesting that Qatar is maximizing its soft power in the international arena (Ulrichsen, 2010: 3-9) and may become a world leader in conflict management and the export of LNG. In relation to the Iraq War, the security shift can be seen in how Qatar is now exercising its power but *the essence of its power is different from the normal criteria for power in the region.* In other words, hard power is characterized as normal power in the region but Qatar's increasing mediation role exemplifies how the concept of power has changed since the Iraq War. In addition, the soft power of Qatar shows an imbalance of power in the region with respect to Iran and Saudi Arabia that is different than before the Iraq War. Nonetheless, the rise of the soft of power in Qatar is considered a new shift of power (Shayan, 2013).

Among the GCC states, another shift of power is probable. To confront the threat of the nuclear energy in Iran, King Abdullah Al Saud, former Saudi Arabian King, had suggested that the GCC states move from a

phase of cooperation to union and confederacy state within a single entity. King Abdullah does not touch upon how this shift should take place, but he wants to point out that "the security of Saudi Arabia and its Arab neighbors was being targeted, in an apparent reference to Iran" (Al Saud, 2011). Muhammed Abdul Ghaffar, a diplomat and adviser to Bahrain's King, evaluates the idea of King Abdullah by asserting that with the political will of the GCC states, the shift from cooperation to union and confederacy is possible. This provides evidence of the alleged change of the power of the GCC states regarding Iran. The shift of power of the GCC states seems more plausible because the US policy of isolating Iran in the region has increased since the Iraq War (Abdul Ghaffar, 2011).

Regarding the broader context of distribution of power in the post-Iraq War era, the shift of power among the regional states is summarized comprehensively by one Saudi Arabian scholar and a think-tank expert on Saudi Arabian political affairs interviewee:

After the Iraqi War, there is a shift and imbalance of power in the region. Saudi Arabian power has decreased while Iran has been empowered by that war. The rise of the Qatari regime has decreased the hegemony of Saudi Arabia over the Persian Gulf, and her leadership somewhat ends. Therefore, the new security context in the region reflects the coalition of Iran and Iraq, the rise of Qatari power, and the decline of Saudi power with a complicated succession story that weakens Saudi Arabia in relation to Iran and Iraq (Interview with Interview with Saudi Arabian scholar and a think-tank expert on Saudi Arabian political affairs 3, January 2018).

The relationship of power has changed in the current security context in the region. The role of the US is somewhat illuminated by one interviewed professor:

What we have is the removal of one of the regional poles of power in Iraq, with Iran benefiting in terms of relative power and a very heavy American involvement during this period through the occupation of Iraq. This is now changing but not as much as some either fear or hope. The US is withdrawing from Iraq but not from the region as a whole (Interview with American professor on the security in the Persian Gulf 4, December 2018).

3-2-3. Rise of New Transnational Actors: Pazhak

The analysis above draws a connection between the current shift of power in the region among the regional great and small states and the US; rise of tensions between Iran and the US. Yet, another shift in the distribution of power of the actors since the Iraq War is recognized as the rise of the new transnational actor in Iran such as Pazhak.

The security shift resulting from the Iraq War has opened up avenues for new actors along the borders of the neighboring states, where religious minorities and the Kurds, Arabs and Baluchs dwell (Ulrichsen, 2011: 26).

From where Pazhak originates, it seems the Kurd people live around the western border of Iran, and they have claimed their independence over time. Since the Iraq War, the so-called Iranian branch of P. K. K, Pazhak, has been supported by external powers and opponents of the Iranian states (the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia, see below) to exercise power and pose a threat to the Iranian state (DFA Press, 2017, 1). Given the threat of Pazhak, Mohammad Khazaee − Iranian Representative in the UN − had announced the threat of terrorist groups in Iran:

Iran is a victim of terrorism. It has taken practical and effective measures in its fight against terrorist and extremist groups (Khazaee 2008).

Iran attributes the threat to Saudi Arabia, Israel and the US for providing aid and support to terrorist members of Pazhak. For example, Tasnim News Agency refers to the financial support of Saudi Arabia to Pazhak to follow its own aims. Saudi Arabia's purpose is not to help Kurds but also it is the Kurds' enemy in Iran, Iraq and Syria. Saudi Arabia supports the US project to destabilize Iran's domestic and borders (Tasnim News Agency in an interview with Emad Oddin Hamroni, a political expert resided in Paris 2018, 15 January). The US view is in contrast to the Iranian perspective. The US Country Report on Terrorism indicates that "Iran and its terrorist affiliates and proxies posed a significant regional threat and demonstrated a near-global terrorist reach. Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism worldwide remained undiminished through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force, its Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and Tehran's proxy Hizballah, which remained a significant threat to the stability of Lebanon and the broader region. Iran supported various Iraqi Shia terrorist groups, including Kata'ib Hizballah" (United States Department of State Publication Bureau of Counterterrorism 2018, 9, 122, 218).

The proposal of the American scholar Mark Perry, on the other hand, acknowledges "how Israeli Mossad officers recruited operatives belonging to the terrorist groups by pretending to be American agents" (Perry 2012). At the same time, Perry is careful to stress that Israel is supposed to work with the US, not against it (Idem.). With the support of the external states, numerous acts of terror have been reported by Pazkhak against the public along the western border. Taking a few examples, many people were killed or injured by acts of terror by Pazhak. In the recent one in 2019, Pazhak had a clash with a member of the Revolutionary Guard in the Chaldoran border area and Ebrahim Akhoondzadeh was martyred (Khabar Online, 1 June 2019).

In another act of terror in the Uromiyeh border, two members of the Revolutionary Guard were killed and seven were injured (Khabar Online, 29 May 2018). Pazhak has also launched a series of high-profile attacks, including one against the Revolutionary Guard Units in the Kamyaran region, local police provinces in the north west of Iran (Mashregh New

Agency, 13 August 2015). This evidence also indicates that Pazhak's contentious relationship with the Iranian state poses a threat to it. The former Intelligence Force of Iran, Heidar Moslehi, as one of the audiences with formal power, had supported the prevention of threats:

Activities of the Intelligence Force against Pazhak continued until it is vanished as a whole (Moslehi quoted in Javan Online 2016).

Iran needs to strengthen bilateral cooperation and reinforce the security of the borders with Iraq. To this end, the security message was that insecure western borders along with the rise of Pazhak caused a threat to the Iranian state and public borders. The execution of a number of Pazhak members by the Iranian state and the Revolutionary Guard, nonetheless, did not hinder the threat along the western border (for example see, Anatoly News Agency 2019, 1). With increased threat of Pazhak, a shift in power is also observed in the sense that states are not necessarily the sole source of power in the region, and cross-border actors can exercise power. However, Pazhak could not undermine the power of the Iranian state.

The hypothesis 'power has been distributed among the regional states, the US and transnational actors' (see above) presented in this analysis is supported. The detailed analysis elucidates that Iran and the US challenge and exercise power to one another, and Qatar exercises soft power. The GCC states look to enhance their power by unifying in order to exercise power coherently against Iran. Pazhak as the transnational actor has emerged and exercises power and threatens the Iranian state.

The analysis in this article demonstrates that during the period between 2004 and 2011, the balance of power policy used by the US in past decades no longer exists. Therefore, the tri-polar power of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq before the Iraq War has changed to a multi-polar power comprised of different actors ranging from regional states and the US to transnational actors since the Iraq War. This finding is in contrast with Fürtig's claim of bi-polarity of power since the Iraq War in the Persian Gulf region.

4. Conclusion

In this article, it was examined how the Iraq War changed the distribution of power among different actors in the Persian Gulf region. The findings extend beyond existing studies concluded that the bi-polarity of power between Iran and the US exists since the Iraq War. They focused on the relationship of power only among the main regional states, and, to some extent, Al Qaeda. Particularly, in relation to Fürtig's study, I find that the great regional states and the US are not the only actors exercising power since the Iraq War. Instead, power has been distributed among the multi-

polar actors ranging from the small and great regional states, and the US to transnational actors such as Pazhak.

Similar to the methodological framework, I find that Levis' analytic narratives offer a suitable perspective to examine the whole assembly of actors. Since the Iraq War, the small state of Qatar has strongly entered into the power relationship of the region and competes with the great regional states, Iran and Saudi Arabia, although the nature of their power is different. Moreover, the Levis' analytic narratives offered an international perspective through penetration of the US in the Persian Gulf region. The post-war distribution of power among the regional states and the US indicated that although the US exercises power in the region, it no longer balances the power of the states. Since the Iraq War, Pazhak has been added to the group of the regional actors and exercises power against Iran. Because of this fact, the narrative analytics helped to analyze the broader perspective of security in the region. Along with securitization, I find that the security complex in the Persian Gulf represents the persistence of some threats. For example, although several key people of Pazhak were killed, acts of terror continue along the western border of Iran.

Yet, in relation to Levi's analytic narratives method, I find that it could explain the *evolution and structure* of the distribution of power in the region. They reveal how evolution occurs when there is a *change* in the Persian Gulf region, and as a result, it influences the *outcomes*. For a long period, there was a status quo in the distribution of power in the region, and the external powers balanced the power of the regional states. To a greater extent, the policy of balance of power by the US continued through the beginning of the new millennium until 2003. However, since the Iraq War, the distribution of power among the actors has not conformed to previous traditions. The new actor of Pazhak has emerged in the region and exercises power and poses a threat to the regional states, namely Iran. The small state of Qatar exercises soft power. The increase of soft power is in contrast with the hard power (military) that has been central in the region since the past decades. Furthermore, Iran has challenged the power of the US in the region since the Iraq War, and in the absence of any balance of power, the US does not possess the same function as before.

Taken together, the relationship of power in the region since the Iraq War is heterogeneous and anarchic. Whereas it is not easy to foresee the distribution of power in the region over the next decades, other variables, such as the transnational actor of Jeisholadl – a terrorist group along the eastern border of Iran - and the other small GCC states such as the UAE - deserve close observation about how they will exercise power in the region.

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