

Geopolitical and Geostrategic Importance of the Iranian Islands in the Persian Gulf

Enayatollah Yazdani ^{1&2} & Ma Yanzhe ¹

¹ School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China

² Department of Political Sciences, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Correspondence: Enayatollah Yazdani, School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China.
yazdani@mail.sysu.edu.cn

Received: November 7, 2021 Accepted: May 26, 2022 Online Published: July 27, 2022

doi:10.5539/res.v14n3p30

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v14n3p30>

Abstract

Iran is a Middle Eastern country which located in the north of the Persian Gulf. Due to the vastness of its territory in the Persian Gulf, Iran has the most beaches in this sea and has a number of the valuable and strategic islands in the entrance of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. In this regards the Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf which are more than 30 islands due to their geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic locations play important role in Iran domestic, regional and global arenas. In addition, some of its islands particularly, three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa have essential military role in Iran's security.

Keywords: Islands, Iran, the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Middle East

1. Introduction

Iran is a country in the Middle East which borders the Persian Gulf, one of the most important waterways in the region. Iran is the largest and one of the most important countries in the region that has always played a significant role in regional and trans-regional relations, especially in the Persian Gulf and now has a special place in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf region. At the same time, the Persian Gulf is of high importance to Iran in its domestic, regional and international arenas, and strategic foreign policy decisions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are always made and formulated with regard to the position of this region.

The Strait of Hormuz, which is the only link between the Persian Gulf and the open waters of the Sea of Oman and Indian Ocean and is the passageway for world's most important energy and all tankers carrying oil must pass through it to send or retrieve oil from the Persian Gulf lies between Iran and a separate small area of Oman. Most part of this strait is under control of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this contributes to the strategic importance of this country. In addition to this global passageway Iran have numbers of Islands in the Persian Gulf which are so strategic in regards with security, energy, economic and tourism and particularly for controlling the Hormuz Strait.

This paper aims to address the importance of the Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf. It explores how these islands have increased the strategic weight of Iran and how they could play role in the security of Strait of Hormuz.

2. The Persian Gulf

The Middle East, in particular its sub region, the Persian Gulf, has been playing an essential role in the global affairs since the ancient time. The Persian Gulf is a semi-enclosed sea between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula that flows through the Strait of Hormuz to the Sea of Oman and from there to the Indian Ocean. This Gulf is one of the most important waterways in the Middle East and West Asia, located along the Sea of Oman. The Persian Gulf has an area of about 93,000 square miles (241,000 square km). Its length is some 615 miles (990 km), and its width varies from a maximum of about 210 miles (340 km) to a minimum of 35 miles (55 km) in the Strait of Hormuz (Vosoughi, 2011:8-16). As the blow map shows the Persian Gulf borders on the north, northeast, and east by Iran; on the southeast and south by part of Oman and by the United Arab Emirates (UAE); on the southwest and west by Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia; and on the northwest by Kuwait and Iraq.



Map of the Persian Gulf (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/63/Persian_Gulf_EN.PNG)

Historically, it is believed that the Persian Gulf was formed about 15,000 years ago. It was an important transportation route in the history. The Persian Gulf was part of the ancient Silk Road. This Gulf, due to its special geopolitical location, is the largest and most important communication center between the three continents of Africa, Europe and Asia. For this reason, many sailors, merchants and traders have passed through this sea in during the history. The history of sailing in the Persian Gulf dates back almost 2,000 years BC, and this region is also important in terms of civilization (Vosoghi, 2011: 54-71). Recent archaeological discoveries on both the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf prove that this area is one of the most important and perhaps the first centers of human habitation and the cradle and exchange center of many civilizations such as Elamite, Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Madi, Persian, Greek and Islamic.(IRNA, 2019) In particular, the Persian Gulf has been connected with Persian (Iranian) civilization for several thousand years.

This crucial waterway has always been of political, military and economic interests to global powers, geologists, archeologists, historiographers and geographers as well. The cultural, political and economic significant of the Persian Gulf have attracted the attention of great powers and has formed conflicts and competitions over the control of this region for a long time. The first Western power that entered to this region was Portugal and it was result of the circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope in 1487, which was done by Vasco da Gama. After that Holland, then France and ultimately Britain and even the Ottoman Empire were other powers that came to this area to pursue their colonial, political and commercial objectives in the region during Sixteenth to Twentieth centuries(Jeffrey, and Saul 2012:43-72, Lunde, 2005: 54-61). In the early of the 20th century, however, the United States entered to the region and replaced the Britain and continued its presence in the Persian Gulf as the main external powerful player in region to date (Sajedi, 2009, Hurewitz, 1972:106-115). Indeed, the Persian Gulf began its role as a commercial highway from ancient times. Since the expansion of the strategic political rivalries of the European powers, the Persian Gulf region has been considered as a significant commercial highway and a crucial link in their strategy chain. In addition, in all parts of the Persian Gulf and its coasts, favorable factors have accumulated and caused important sources of oil which are found at the bottom of the sea and in the heart of the lands of the Gulf coast, making this region one of the most richest oil regions in the world, these factors are: sedimentation and deposition of seawater, organic materials buried with calcareous flowers in the depths of the sea, and the movements of the earth, which causes the folding of the earth's crust and the emergence of anticlines and Navadis in this region. These factors, along with many animals and fish that have existed in this sea for a long time and have

decomposed and precipitated in the posthumous period, have made the oil reserve area so vast that it can be seen less in other parts of the world, these oil reserves and its rock classes from Mosul in Iraq to the Zagros and Bakhtiari mountains and Iran's beaches and underwater areas extend to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (Bidokhti and Ezam, 2009, Kessler 1973). Accordingly, the Persian Gulf is called the world's largest oil reservoir. In addition to oil the region is rich in natural gas. This Gulf, not only plays a crucial role in connecting a commercial highway between the East and West of the world but also with its abundant natural and mineral resources, it is considered as one of the two ends in the world's economic exchanges. Accordingly, over the history the Persian Gulf's increasing value has also caused some economic and especially political disputes.

The Persian Gulf is called as world oil store due to existing of vast reserves of oil and gas. It is also considerable that Persian Gulf has several different advantages such as oil wells with high outcomes, low production costs, transit inexpensiveness, raw oil with high quality, locating possibility of new oil wells, and mass quantity of oil wells. It is interesting that there is between 250,000 to one million tons in each oil well of the Persian Gulf while they are about 20,000 tons in Venezuela and 600 tons in the U.S (Jafari Valdani, 2002).

In addition, the Persian Gulf is also one of the most important strategic regions of the world and one of the reasons for its strategic importance is the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz is a crescent-shaped crossing connecting the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and it is among the eleven straits of the world and the most important one which has a great economic and strategic status for major powers. Another importance of the Persian Gulf is its islands. The Persian Gulf is home for about 130 large and small islands with different land structures. The Persian Gulf islands differ greatly due to different atmospheric, natural and marine conditions. Some of these islands are inhabited and others are uninhabited (Roshandel, 2002: 135-153). Uninhabited islands are generally unable to live because of the tides of the sea, and some inhabited islands have long been attacked and invaded by colonists due to natural blessings or strategic importance, while others have enjoyed tranquility. Some of the Persian Gulf's islands have played important role in fields of economy, trade, security, military, and tourism in the region during the history.

Furthermore, the military and security dimension of the Persian Gulf has a special place in international relations. The presence of numerous naval, air and land bases in the Persian Gulf region, mostly belonging to the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the presence of Western warships, especially the United States, in the Waters of the Persian Gulf, demonstrate the military and strategic importance of this region.

In general, the importance of the Persian Gulf is such that it is mentioned in inscriptions and historical texts discovered from the first civilizations formed in Mesopotamia to the central plateau of Iran; the importance of sea routes, which became the focus of the rulers of the time due to the insecurity of land routes, along with the important position of trade, commerce, culture, security and military have increased the role and importance of the Persian Gulf in regional and global affairs.

3. The Importance of the Persian Gulf for Iran

As mentioned, the Persian Gulf is one of the most important waterways in the Middle East and West Asia, located along the Sea of Oman and between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Of the neighboring Persian Gulf countries (Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain), as it can be seen in the below map Iran has the largest share of the common water border with the Persian Gulf. The northern coast of the Persian Gulf is monopolized by Iran's political geography. The length of Iran's water border with the Persian Gulf, 1375 km of coastline, from Bandar Abbas to Faw peninsula, meaning Iran alone has 56.5% of the total coast of the Persian Gulf (Map) Mojtahedzadeh, 2000).



Map of Iran's Position in the Persian Gulf

(<https://cdn1.vectorstock.com/i/1000x1000/12/25/islamic-republic-iran-map-vector-1551225.jpg>)

Geographically and culturally, Iran is the heart of the Middle East. Iran is the largest and most important country that has always played an important role in regional and trans-regional relations, especially in the Persian Gulf region, and now has a special place in the region. Iran's cultural background compared to other countries in this region and its religious identity as well as Iran's economic and practical capabilities have led to more potential impacts in the region and even global developments. This role of intercontinental communication and proximity to the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, which is the transit point for oil shipments, has added to Iran's importance and effective role in the eyes of foreign observers, so that any political development in it will provoke global sensitivities (Zolfaghari, 2007). Accordingly, one can assume that the Persian Gulf is very important for Iran and the country has vital interests in this region. In fact, the Persian Gulf is of high importance to Iran in domestic, regional and international arenas, and strategic foreign policy decisions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are always made and formulated with regard to the position of this region.

Economically, the largest oil and gas fields in the region, i.e. about 16.5% of oil reserves and 45.5% of natural gas reserves in the region belong to Iran ((Ahmadi, 2008:76-51). In addition to economic dimension, the military and security dimension of the Persian Gulf has a special place in Iranian foreign relations. The Persian Gulf is one of the regions that plays an important role in making decisions and confronting military threats. Therefore, the Persian Gulf has always been the first priority in making decisions and implementing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

The Persian Gulf indeed, is of great importance to Iran due to a number of reasons:

- 1-Almost all Iranian oil is exporting through the Persian Gulf
- 2-around 80% of the Iranian trade is done via this Gulf
- 3-another reason is that the Iranian government during the last two to three decades has invested a lot in its islands and ports in the Persian Gulf

4-the existence of Iran's oil and gas fields in the Persian Gulf in particular in the islands

5- One significant aspect of the Persian Gulf for Iran is the Strait of Hormuz, which is located in the south of Iran

6-another factor which has made the Persian Gulf very important to Iran is the Iranian Islands in this Gulf

7- the military and security dimensions of the Persian Gulf has also a special place in Iran's foreign relations

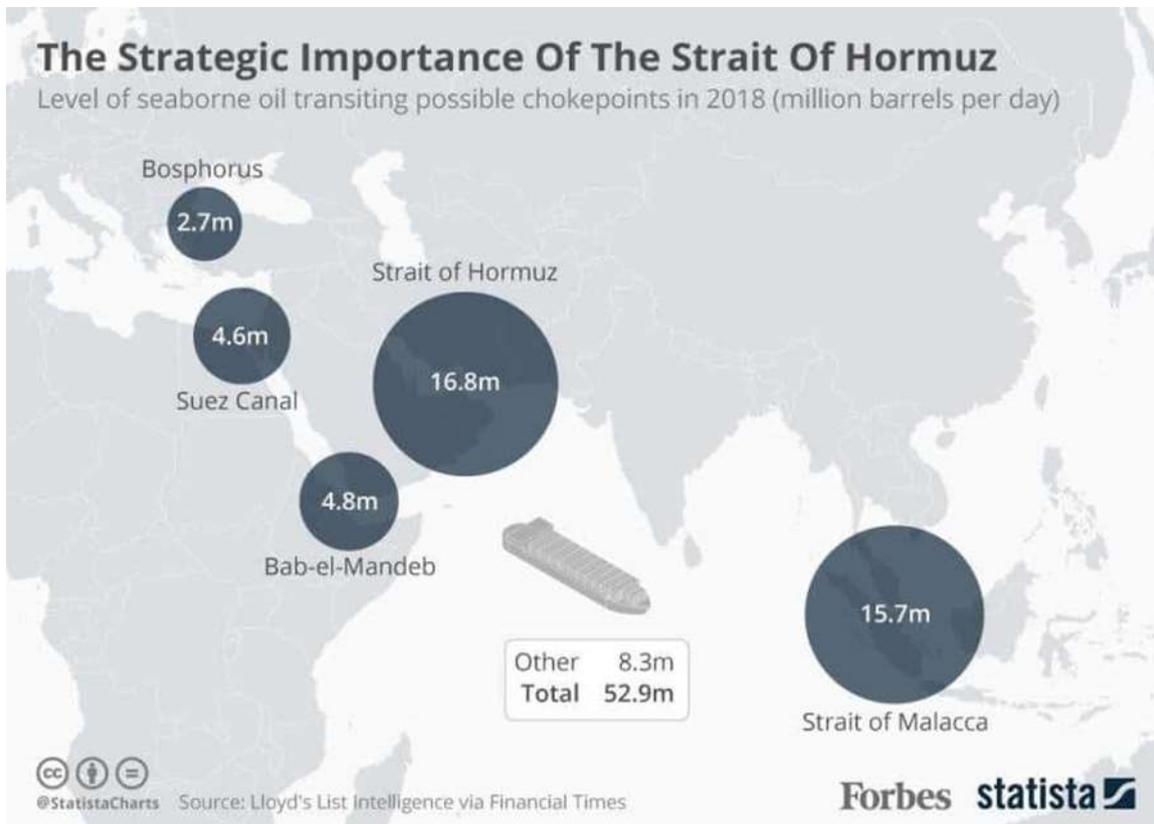
Therefore, one should bear in mind that the Persian Gulf is one of the regions that plays an important role in making decisions and confronting military threats. Accordingly, the Gulf has always been the first priority in making decisions and implementing foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and at the international level is one of the regions that has been of particular importance due to its special geographical location and having abundant oil and marine resources and strategic and geopolitical prominences. In particular, the Strait of Hormuz and more than 30 Iranian islands and several ports in the Persian Gulf, have made the Gulf an essential part of Tehran's politico-economic and security approach at regional and international levels.

4. A-Significant of the Strait of Hormuz

Chokepoints, which according to US Energy Information Administration defines as "narrow channel along widely used global sea routes that is critical to energy security", are vital transit routes for the international maritime trade and business (EIA, 2019). It is necessary that the smooth flow of ships continue to take place as international trade is highly dependent upon these chokepoints. Even a momentary closure of any world's eight key maritime chokepoints can disrupt the global economy, effecting millions of people throughout the globe. Global food supply and energy market are highly reliant on them. Throughout the world, about 200 canal or straits are present, however, only few are considered as chokepoints, which derive their strategic significance from the fact that their closure can stop the sea traffic carrying millions of tons of oil per day (Jahangir, 2020). Therefore, tensions can rise emerging from the global power dynamics revolving around the world's chokepoints.

One of the most essential chokepoint globally, through which most of the international oil consumption gets transported, is the Strait of Hormuz. This Strait is a curved sea beam located at the eastern end of the Persian Gulf that separates the Iranian plateau from the Arabian Peninsula and links the waters of the Persian Gulf to the Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman—the only passage from the oil-rich gulf to the Indian Ocean and global market. Located between Iran and Oman, the Strait of Hormuz links the Persian to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean (Bumiller, Schmitt & Shanker 2012). This strait is a trough from the third geological period that interrupts the continuation of the southern mountains of Iran to the Mesdam Peninsula (Mojtahedzadeh, 1995: 176-178).

Theoretically, the Strait of Hormuz has a special place in geopolitical theories. According to Spykeman's theory, whoever control Rimland (the margin of the earth) will decay the world. Rimland's theory was presented with variations in Mackinder's Heartland theory. Rimland is a coastal country located in western and southern Europe and south Asia. Based on Spykman's Rimland theory, the coastal areas or littorals of Eurasia are key to controlling the World Island. According to this theory, the Strait of Hormuz is the center of Rimland and connects the northern, southern, western and eastern parts to each other. Therefore, according to Rimland's theory, control of the Strait of Hormuz will mean control of the four mentioned sections. Of course, in addition to Hormuz Strait, there are two other straits, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Malacca, which also are the Rimland keys (Map) (Dallmayr, 1999). In this manner, there is this view that any state, which can control three straits; Bab-el-Mandeb, Hormuz and Malacca, it will control the world. It is interesting to note that, this theory is acceptable yet and based on this reality the Strait of Hormuz as the below map shows has more important position because it is geographically located between two other mentioned straits (map) Esmael, and Abbas, Hamzah, 2020, Jafari Valdani, 2002).



The Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz (Venture 2019)

Albuquerque, the Portuguese invading admiral to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, believed that any government that dominated the three Straits of Bab al-Mandab, Hormuz and Malacca would dominate the world(Lunde, 2005: 54-61). This theory remains valid to this day. Among the three straits, the Strait of Hormuz is located in the center and dominance of the strait will mean dominating the other two straits. For this reason, in the past, countries that wanted to dominate the Indian Ocean tried to take over the Strait of Hormuz before taking any action.

The Strait of Hormuz represents one the most significant oil chokepoints (table). Indeed, it is the passageway for world’s most important oil, forming a chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. The entire strait is only 180 km long and at its narrowest point about 45 km wide and is the only route to the open sea, carrying more than one- sixth of global oil production and one- third of the world’s supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG).Therefore, Strait of Hormuz due to its economic, communication and military functions at the regional and global scale is of strategic importance (see the below table).

Exporting Oil through the Strait of Hormuz (US EIA, 2019)

Crude oil, condensate, and petroleum products transported through the Strait of Hormuz
million barrels per day

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total oil flows through Strait of Hormuz	17.2	18.4	20.6	20.3	20.7
Crude and condensate	14.4	15.2	17.3	17.2	17.3
Petroleum products	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.3
World maritime oil trade	56.4	58.9	61.2	62.5	N/A
World total petroleum and other liquids consumption	93.9	95.9	96.9	98.5	99.9
LNG flows through Strait of Hormuz (Tcf per year)	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.1

Simultaneously, there are the numerous amounts of goods which are entering to the Persian Gulf and pass through the Strait of Hormuz, by far more than exports from this region. For this reason, indeed, almost all of the Persian Gulf states are dependent on this waterway for export and import of oil and goods and only 20% of region’s oil can be exported by pipelines because of high expenditures and security-political considerations (Naji and Jawan, 2011) Only Saudi Arabia

and Iraq have oil pipelines among region countries and use pipelines to transit some of their oil so. It is not an efficient way to export of oil overall and will cause problems similar to what Iraq faced, like problems of the pipelines which exported the Iraqi oil to Mediterranean Sea through turkey and Syria and both were closed in 1983 and 1991 (Taghavi-Asl, 2000). From this point of view, the world energy security, increasingly, depends on security of the Hormuz Strait in the Persian Gulf too.

Geopolitically, as the below map shows Iran controls the northern coast of Hormuz Strait, while Oman controls the southern coast (map). This strait contains two shipping lanes used for large ships. Each channel is 3.2 km wide, with a buffer zone of 3.2 km in between. (Sigit and Texas Meresin, 2020). If we liken the world to the human body, we should consider oil as the blood of life and consider the Strait of Hormuz as the heart of this body, meaning this strait is “heart” of the world. The Strait experiences the passage of ships that carry about 16 to 18 million barrels of oil and not less than 2 million barrels of petroleum products. This is about 40 per cent of all the oil and petroleum products traded in the international market. According to Bumiller, Schmitt and Shanker (2012), this means that the view of the Strait of Hormuz in any direction is usually full of shipping. As a result, it is evident that any considerable disruption of the shipping activities in the Strait would lead to immediate effect on the global economy. This sharply affects both energy prices and supplies.



The Strait of Hormuz (<https://theloadstar.com/wp-content/uploads/Strait-of-Hormuz.png>)

Historically, the significance of this strait is so high that before the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, many world's great colonial powers were competing over the strait and taking power on the highway. These powers were seeking culminated with the discovery of oil and a major transformation in the world economy, however, the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the end point for the indulgence of these powers (Hafeznia and Rabiei, 2012:86-94). Throughout history, this strait has been the cause of the relationship between South and Southeast Asia with the Plateau region of Iran and Mesopotamia, Mediterranean and Europe, and has connected the centers of civilizations located in the mentioned regions and has played an effective role in the transfer and distribution of commercial and commercial goods as well as cultural and social values.

The Hormuz Strait is strategically significant and presents one of the main marine choke points in the entire world (Briney, 2020). In fact, this strait is of strategic significance for this reason because it is the only one naval way to deliver oil and natural gas from Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Significant volumes of the oil are transported to Western Europe, China, Japan, and the United States. To this, these nations have a pivotal interests in protecting the free passage via the Strait of Hormuz (Jahangir, 2020).

From military and security point of view the Strait of Hormuz has a very significant position. The security of this strait as a safe route for energy transfer of the Persian Gulf countries to all over the world is tied to the security of many countries that are geographically thousands of kilometers away.

As for Iran, energy, security and commerce through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz are essential elements of Tehran's foreign relations. Due to the volume of 80% of the country's exports and imports from it, along with Tehran and Khuzestan, this region is one of the most sensitive and strategic regions of the country (Hafeznia and Rabiei, 2012: 102-125). Besides economic importance, the Strait of Hormuz has special communication, military and geopolitical advantages for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a 50 percent sovereignty of the Strait of Hormuz, which holds the pulse of the Persian Gulf. Near this strait Iran has a number of significant Islands with a specific position, is ruled in the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance of the Persian Gulf (Ahmadi, 2008: 146-158). The importance of these islands, in particular, is due to their security and military position, which is considered as a defensive stronghold of the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz, indeed, has promoted strategic importance of the Persian Gulf. It is a narrow and curve channel with about 100 miles length and 21 miles in its narrowest parts that connects the Persian Gulf to high seas through the Sea of Oman and Indian Ocean. It is worth noting that, width of each used new sailing lines from 1979 is about 1 mile and the lines are separated from each other by a security line with 1 mile width, while there are several strategic islands in entrance of the Persian Gulf that seven Iranian islands among them have created a curve line, where have the most strategic position in the Hormuz Strait and thus because these islands have short distances between each other, a virtual line has been drawn along the islands (Mojtahedzadeh, 1995).

5. b-Importance of the Iranian Islands

Islands have been used as strategic naval bases to launch naval expeditions since the advent of mankind. Islands have strategic significance due to their geopolitical location, proximity to trade routes and being well developed harbors. History has borne the fact that in the past, western maritime power could control Oceans and littoral countries by virtue of possessing islands. Islands are economic assets, valued solely for their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and under-seabed resources and are military assets with strategic and tactical value and barring significant volcanic activity. Today, island bases—particularly isolated ones with a strong port infrastructure or a good airstrip—are irreplaceable (Agarwala, 2014).

Islands can be defense outposts that can host military hardware, staging posts and air bases, radars, listening stations and intelligence assets of all descriptions. They can provide extremely useful military assets for a state, and perhaps also the allies of that state to use. For this reason, many states who have islands are very careful not to exploit their military utility too far, for fear that they become crisis points with other parties to the dispute.

Due to the vastness of its territory in the Persian Gulf, Iran has the most beaches in this sea and has a number of the valuable and strategic islands in the entrance of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz (see the below map). From about 130 the Persian Gulf islands 30 islands belong to Iran and are under the Iranian sovereignty. Of these 30 islands about 20 islands have geopolitical and strategic importance in terms of sovereignty over the international waterway of Strait of Hormuz and its control (map).



The Iranian Islands in the Persian Gulf (<http://iranontrip.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Islands-of-Persian-Gulf.jpg>)

The Iranian Islands in the Persian Gulf have different structures and characteristics. The main characteristics of the Iranian Islands are:

- 1-Some of the islands are inhabited and others are uninhabited. Uninhabited islands are generally unable to live because of their natural structure.¹
- 2-Some of these Islands are very important due to their military and security position
- 3- The geological structures of the Iranian islands are very divers
- 4- Some these islands are considered very valuable in terms of diversity of animal specie, these islands are biodiversity hotspots and home to rare species
- 5-Some of the Iranian Islands contain natural, ecological attractive which are good destination for internal, regional and global tourists
- 6-Some of these islands have considerable amount of oil and gas
- 7-some of the islands are large and some of them are small
- 8- each island has its own cultural and historical features

In the Strait of Hormuz there are two groups of islands which owned by its coastal countries: the first category is the Iranian islands and the second category is the islands under the rule of the government of Oman. Dominance of the Strait of Hormuz added to the global prestige and geopolitical position of Iran. Therefore, the Strait of Hormuz is considered as the vital throat of Iran. To achieve this goal, islands around the Strait of Hormuz are also vitally important. Seven islands which are located in the entrance of the Persian Gulf, are of particular strategic importance to protect the Strait of Hormuz. These seven islands are called the curved line and make up Iran's arch-defense chain are strategically important. These islands include Hormuz, Lark, Qeshm, Hengam, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa (Mojtahedzadeh, 2000: 33-39). These important islands are located at relatively short distances from each other. A hypothetical curve connecting these islands would further help to understand Iran's strategic superiority in controlling the security of the Strait of Hormuz.

Geographically, the Persian Gulf is not a deep sea, and interestingly, the deepest part of it, which is suitable for shipping, especially the transportation of large ships, is located almost within the limits of Iran. "Regarding shipping in the Persian

¹ Recently the Iranian government has announced that he Iranian islands of the Persian Gulf would be turned into residential areas and that Tehran plans to prepare the Persian Gulf islands for the people to live on by creating the residential infrastructure (The Iranian, 2020).

Gulf and the importance of Abu Musa and Tunbs islands, large and small, it should be noted that due to the shallow depth of water in all parts of the Strait of Hormuz, which extends from Ross Mesdam to Bandar Abbas, large ships are unable to cross and have to move through a limited area equivalent to fifteen kilometers and the depth of water is sufficient for them to pass. In the north part of this passage are the Iranian islands of Qeshm, Hormuz and Larak. In addition, at the beginning of this crossing, large warships and tankers are forced to walk past the Iranian islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa.

In addition to their strategic importance, these islands are very crucial for Iranian economy, and tourism industry. The diversity of geological structures of the Iranian islands caused attracting many domestic and international tourists every year. There are many valuable attractions such as beautiful landscapes around the island, ocher mine, coral reefs, rocky shores, sea caves, various shapes and material of coastal banks, native vegetation, resident wildlife on the island and some cultural and historical features. Qeshm Island, one of the largest Persian Gulf's islands and the largest Iran's island in the Gulf, and another Iranian island, Kish, are two attractive destinations for internal, regional and international tourists. These two islands have become tourist hub due to their abundant tourist attractions. Hormuz Island is known as Paradise of Geologists for its diverse and unique geologic and biologic phenomena and its high potential for becoming an excellent geotourism pole in the Persian Gulf area too (Ranjbaran, Zamanzadeh and Sotohian, 2020). In addition to the geological and natural attractions of the area, the ancient and cultural features of the island, this island has a great potential from ecotourism standpoint due to a variety of its fauna and flora as well (Amrikazemi and Mehrpooya, 2006). As Free Trade Zones (FTZ) are regarded as an example of local strategies working in consort with international processes to fashion new forms of economic and political interconnectedness, the Iranian islands of Kish and Qeshm are two substantial free trade zones which have great impact not only on the Islamic Republic's economy but also on the regional economy.

Military dimension of the Iranian islands is also of great significance. In this regards, among those six Iranian islands three of them of very crucial due to their geopolitical and geostrategic position which is very vital for the Islamic Republic of Iran security. The three islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb have an extraordinary geostrategic location in the Strait of Hormuz and in the Persian Gulf. Totally, in the Strait of Hormuz Iran has 19 islands (those 6 islands are included), which are strategically and military important. According to the Iranian officials these islands are considered as 19 aircraft carriers that are stationary and unsinkable for the Islamic Republic of Iran (Tangsiri, 2012).

6. Importance of the three Iranian Islands

The islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and lesser Tunb (the below map) with four other Iranian islands that are located in the Strait of Hormuz, form a strategic archipelago that runs over the roads entry and exit. Their position in Iran's strategic chain in the Strait of Hormuz is of great importance. Indeed, Tunbs and Abu Musa Islands have key, geopolitical and strategic positions in maintaining the security and freedom of shipping in the Persian Gulf (map). All Iranian oil exports and about 80% of foreign trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran are generated through the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. Therefore, the value of these islands from the perspective of global transportation, supporting Iran's oil exports and at the macro level, foreign trade is of particular importance.



Map of three Iranian Islands

Sources: <https://media.mehrnews.com/d/2016/10/17/3/2244561.jpg?ts=1486462047399>

The islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and lesser Tunb are located in the deepest parts of the Persian Gulf, within the corridors of the world commute separation plan. This has caused the special value of these three Iranian Islands from a geopolitical and strategic point of view, because a valuable part of the world's crude oil is required, runs through these islands. Consequently, their control by the Iranian government in order to freely take refuge in global shipyards is supporting the financial beneficiaries of Iran and the countries of the Persian Gulf region (Jafari Vladani, 1998:55-58) In other words, located in a strategic zone near the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, controlling these islands would enable Iran to dominate the sea-lanes entering and exiting the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, these three islands are of great importance in defending Iran and are incredibly militarily significant and have a special defensive position in south of Iran. Yet, the military value of the three islands is only important for Iran, not for other countries, including the southern rim of the Persian Gulf. In fact, one can assume that, the major reason for the significance of the three islands should be searched in military considerations. The Greater Tunb and lesser Tunb islands together with Abu Musa form part of the defense and protection system of the Strait of Hormuz and the southern coasts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in addition to their geographical location deep in the waters of the Persian Gulf as well as inside the two round-trip corridors of the international ship traffic separation plan, they have made them of particular strategic significance. Kebriaeizadeh(2019), an Iranian expert, believes that in its regional security system, Iran can use the Strait of Hormuz's potentials. It is clear that the strait consists of waterway plus the islands. On the contrary, the Islands of Oman, which are rocky and uninhabitable and with little capability for security exploitation, the Iranian islands with privileged geographical location and favorable geological structure have created the possibility and capability of military and security exploitation for Iran. Therefore, it is necessary for the Islamic Republic of Iran to take advantage of its territorial advantages, long shore, and favorable position of the seven islands to create deterrence. In the meantime, Hormuz Island with a favorable location at the entrance of the Strait, Larak Island as the most advanced point of Iranian sovereignty in the Strait of Hormuz, Hengam Island is the most suitable place for the establishment of the first defense shield and the three islands Greater Tunb and lesser Tunb and Abu Musa islands as the constituent of the second defensive curve in case of threats and threats of war. It can consolidate Iran's complete dominance over the Strait of Hormuz.

The shape and structure of a project that has been walked around the islands of Greater Tunb, lesser Tunb and Forur is located in the Iranian land sea, because the depth of water in the coasts of Iran is between 40 and 73 meters, while in the south and south-east coasts and the Persian Gulf head, it is between five and ten meters. The plan includes two crossings and the return of one side to a length of 50 miles.

6. Conclusion

Iran, which is located in the north of the Persian Gulf, is one of the major regional powers in the Middle East. Its geopolitical position particularly its important position in the Persian Gulf has led Iran to play a strategic role in regional and global affairs. The Persian Gulf is the largest and most important communication center between the three continents due to its special location. The existence of rich resources and the relationship between this gulf and the world's major water regions have made this region one of the most important strategic regions in the world. The waterway is also important for Iran in the domestic, regional and regional affairs, and strategic foreign policy decisions are always made and formulated with regard to the importance of this region. In fact, the position of the Persian Gulf in various developments in Iran's history cannot be overlooked. In other words, the political, economic, security and social structure of Iran has been always affected by its geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics.

Moreover, Iran has a 50 percent sovereignty of one of the most important international straits, the Strait of Hormuz, which holds the pulse of the Persian Gulf. It has become more important when the ample amount of Oil exportation to industrial world and also goods importation to Middle East transport throughout this strategic strait. The importance of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz for Iran are associated with the significant Iranian Islands in the Gulf. These islands which some of them are habitant and some are inhabitant due to their geostrategic and economic position are very crucial to the Islamic Republic of Iran's domestic and external policy. In addition to their role in the Iranian economy in fields of energy, trade, transportation and tourism, they play a very essential role in the country's security and have great place in its military position. Accordingly, Iran has bases and navy and military equipment in some of these islands. Among these islands, three Iranian islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa due to their military position, which is considered as a defensive stronghold of the Strait of Hormuz. These three of the seven Iranian islands known as arch islands and indeed, make up Iran's arch-defense chain. A hypothetical curve connecting these islands would further help to understand Iran's strategic superiority in controlling the security of the Strait of Hormuz.

In sum, the Iranian Islands in the Persian Gulf are considered as an important part of the Islamic Republic's geopolitical, geostrategic, geoeconomic, geotourism, security and military sects. To this, Tehran has always been concern about these islands, as they have been playing a crucial role not only in the Iranian domestic affairs but also in the Islamic Republic position in regional and global levels.

References

- Ahmadi, K. (2008). *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf: Abu Musa and the Tunbs in strategic perspective*. Routledge.
- Agarwala, N. (2014). *Strategic Importance of Islands for Naval Operations*. INA Seminar, New Delhi, 110 048, October 17-18.
- Amrikazemi, A., & Mehrpooya, A. (2006). Geotourism resources of Iran. In *Geotourism* (pp. 78-92). Routledge.
- Bidokhti, A. A., & Ezam, M. (2009). The structure of the Persian Gulf outflow subjected to density variations. *Ocean Science*, 5(1), 1-12.
- Briney, A. (2020). The Strait of Hormuz is a Chokepoint Between Persian Gulf and The Arabian Sea. *Thought Co*, January, 23.
- Bumiller, E., Schmitt, E., & Shanke, T. (2012). *US Warns Top Iran Leader Not to Shut Strait of Hormuz*. New York Times, January 13.
- Dallmayr, F. R. (1999). *Border Crossings: Toward a comparative political theory*. Lanham: Lexington books.
- Barden, J. (2019). The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint. *Today in Energy*, 20.
- Esmael, A. A., Faisal, S. A., & Majeed, K. H. (2020). The Strategic Importance of the Strait. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 12(1).
- Hafeznia, M. R., & Rabiei, H. (2012). *Persian Gulf and strategic role of Strait of Hormuz*, Tehran: SAMT.
- Hurewitz, J. C. (1972). The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 401, 106-115.
- IRNA(2019). Persian Gulf; Iran's territorial identity. IRNA, June 19.
- Jafari, V. A. (1997). A Historical Look at the Iranian Islands of Tunb and Abu Musa Tehran: IPIS, pp. 36-37.
- Jafari Valadani, A. (1998). *Centers in the Persian Gulf*, Tehran: Kayhan Publications Organization.
- Valdani, A. J. (2002). New geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. *Tehran: publication of foreign ministry of Iran*.

- Geluk'ashvili, I. A. (2014). Jeffrey R. Macris and Saul Kelly, eds. *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 15(3).
- Jahangir, S. (2020). Strait of Hormuz Global Geostrategic Significance. *World Geostrategic Insight*, July 5, at [Strait of Hormuz Global Geostrategic Significance - World Geostrategic Insights \(wgi.world\)](#)
- Kassler, P. (1973). The structural and geomorphic evolution of the Persian Gulf. In *The Persian Gulf* (pp. 11-32). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
- Kebriaeizadeh, H. (2019). *Requirements of Iran's Security Model in the Strait of Hormuz*. International Studies & Research Institute, Tehran, September.
- Lunde, P. (2005). *The Coming of the Portuguese*. Saudi Aramco World, July/August.
- Mojtahedzadeh, P. (1995). *Political Geography of Hormuz Strait*. Tehran: Saghir Publication.
- MojtahedZadeh, P. (2000). *The Persian Gulf: Countries and Borders*, Tehran: Ataie Publication.
- Naji, S., & Jawan, J. (2011). Role of the Persian Gulf's oil in the US geopolitical codes during the Cold War geopolitical order. *International journal of humanities and social science*, 1(5), 206-220.
- Ranjbaran, M., Zamanzadeh, S. M., & Sotohian, F. (2020). Geotourism attractions of Hurmoz Island, Iran. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 28(1), 232-245.
- Roshandel, J. (2002). On the Persian Gulf Islands. in Lawrence G. PotterGary G. Sick(eds), *Security in the Persian Gulf: Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus*, New York:Palgrave Macmillan, 135-153.
- Sajedi, A. (2009). Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf Security: Iran and the United States. *IPRI (Islamic Policy Research Institute)*, IX(2), 77-89.
- Sigit, & Meresin, A. T. (2020). China's Geopolitical Strategy in the Strait of Hormuz. *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 2(02), 2050009.
- Taghavi-Asl, S. A. (2000). *The new geopolitics of Iran, from Kazakhstan to Georgia*, Tehran: Publication of Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry.
- Tangsiri, A. (2012). Iranian Islands of the Persian Gulf as 19Nav Aircraft Carriers. *Entekhab*, December 12, s at <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/87020/>
- The Iranian. (2020). Iran to build houses on Persian Gulf islands. *The Iranian*, May 1.
- Venture, (2019). *The Strait Of Hormuz: A Global Strategic Importance*. *Levant Business Intelligence*, June 22.
- Vosoughi, M. B. (2011). *History of the Persian Gulf and neighboring countries*, Tehran: SAMT.
- Zolfaghari, M. (2007). *Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf: Iran and the United States (Threats and Opportunities for The Processing of the Islamic Republic)*. *Political Approach*, No. 15.

Maps Sources

- https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/63/Persian_Gulf_EN.PNG
- <https://cdn1.vectorstock.com/i/1000x1000/12/25/islamic-republic-iran-map-vector-1551225.jpg>
- <https://media.mehrnews.com/d/2016/10/17/3/2244561.jpg?ts=1486462047399>
- <http://iranontrip.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Islands-of-Persian-Gulf.jpg>
- <https://theloadstar.com/wp-content/uploads/Strait-of-Hormuz.png>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).