

## Geopolitical Dynamics of Maritime Security in the Strait of Hormuz

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### Abstract

*The Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime passageway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, plays a pivotal role in global energy trade. This study examines the multifaceted challenges surrounding this strategic waterway, which varies from 55 to 95 kilometers in width. The research explores the strait's economic significance, not only for Persian Gulf nations but for the global market, as evidenced by the high density of maritime traffic. The analysis encompasses the recurring security disturbances in recent decades, including tanker attacks and piracy incidents, which compound regional security complexities. Furthermore, the geopolitical dynamics of the Strait of Hormuz are scrutinized, particularly in relation to tensions between Iran, the United States, and Gulf states. Historical conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf conflict, are evaluated to demonstrate the strait's impact on global oil prices and economic stability. The study also addresses challenges like theft and extortion, which further complicate navigation and maritime security. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the geographical, economic, and security characteristics of the Strait of Hormuz, this research aims to elucidate the challenges in maintaining regional and international stability, emphasizing the waterway's critical role in global energy security and international trade.*

**Keywords:** Strait Of Hormuz, Maritime Security, And Geopolitical Dynamics

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## INTRODUCTION

The Strait of Hormuz, a strategic maritime route connecting the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, plays a vital role in the global oil and natural gas trade (Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2023). With a width varying from 55 to 95 kilometers, the strait is a critical checkpoint for global energy transportation, with about 21% of the world's petroleum liquids passing through it every day (Gaur et al. 2023). The density of ship traffic in the Strait of Hormuz reflects its economic significance, which is not only limited to countries around the Persian Gulf such as Iran, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, but has also influenced global markets in recent decades (Shaikh et al., 2022).

Geopolitics The Strait of Hormuz also plays a significant role in regional and international political dynamics, especially with the frequent tensions between Iran, the United States and the Gulf states. Events such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the First Gulf War (1990-1991), historical conflicts in the region have demonstrated the potential for regional instability that can disrupt global oil prices and economic stability, leading to price spikes and supply disruptions (Yergin, 2020).

The Strait of Hormuz has frequently experienced security disturbances, including attacks on tankers and acts of piracy that add to the complexity of regional security (Albasoos et al., 2019), challenges such as theft and extortion in the Strait of Hormuz add another layer of complexity to maritime navigation and security in the region. The importance of the Strait of Hormuz is not only from an economic perspective, but also from a global energy security perspective, making it a major subject of concern in the foreign policies and security strategies of many countries. In this context, a deep understanding of the geopolitical and strategic dynamics of the Strait of Hormuz is essential to ensure the smooth and sustainable flow of international trade in the future. Through an in-depth analysis of the geographical, economic and

security characteristics of the Strait of Hormuz, this essay aims to uncover the challenges faced in maintaining regional and international stability.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach to conduct an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical complexities surrounding the Strait of Hormuz. The primary methodology employed is library research, an approach that enables researchers to collect and analyze data from a wide array of relevant literary sources (Zed, 2004). Primary data sources are textbooks, historical archives, newspapers, reliable internet sources, and online publications from prominent institutions. This diverse selection of sources aims to obtain a comprehensive and up-to-date perspective on the geopolitical dynamics in the Strait of Hormuz (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This method allows researchers to access information from various viewpoints, ranging from academic analyses to current reports on developments in the region. By utilizing this methodological approach, the research aims to provide an in-depth and contextual analysis of the strategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz in contemporary global geopolitical dynamics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Characteristics of the Strait of Hormuz*

The Strait of Hormuz serves as a crucial maritime link, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, which in turn leads to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean (Lott & Kawagishi, 2022). The strait's geography is notable for its narrow central section, where the territorial waters of the bordering nations converge. This central area is situated to the north of Oman's Musandam Peninsula, between Oman's Great Quoin Island and Iran's Larak Island (Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1979). It is only in this central region that the territorial seas of the coastal states intersect. Geographically, the Strait of Hormuz varies in width from 35 miles to 60 miles (approximately 55 kilometres to 95 kilometres) and serves as a natural divide between Iran to the north and the Arabian Peninsula to the south (Gaur et al. 2023). It is one of the most important maritime *checkpoints* in the world, vital to the transport of oil from the Middle East to global markets.

Geographically, Oman is bordered by the Republic of Yemen to the southwest, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, and the United Arab Emirates to the north. In addition, Oman is also surrounded by the Arabian Sea and a number of neighbouring islands (al-Ghailani, 2017). Countries bordering the Strait of Hormuz include Iran to the north and Oman to the south. Around the Strait of Hormuz, the United Arab Emirates' maritime territory spans the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. The United Arab Emirates has the second longest coastline in the Persian Gulf, after Iran, covering most of the east coast of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. The Strait of Hormuz also extends into the maritime territories of countries such as Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar. The geopolitical diversity along the Strait of Hormuz reflects the complexity of maritime and security relations in the region. The depth of the Strait of Hormuz is mostly more than 100 metres in areas crossed by major shipping lanes (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2004).



**Figure 1.** Fragment of the Strait of Hormuz Map  
Source: (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2004).

Iran and Oman's relationship has varied over time. Sometimes they are friends and sometimes they are enemies. But due to geographical factors, the two countries have to cooperate with each other as they share a maritime border in the Strait of Hormuz (Albasoos et al. 2019). The Strait of Hormuz has global economic significance as it is a vital choke point for oil transport. However, in recent decades, international navigation in the Strait of Hormuz has been subject to frequent disruptions and attacks that primarily target oil tankers (Kraska, 2013). One of the most important maritime routes in the world, the Strait of Hormuz is the main route for shipping oil from the Middle East to global markets. More than three-quarters of the oil is shipped to Asian countries, mostly to China, India, Japan and South Korea (Barden, 2022). The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz are important to Iran's oil industry. Iran's oil and gas reserves and major ports are located along the Gulf near other coastal countries (Rahmah et al, 2022). Security in the Strait of Hormuz is crucial for Iran as disruptions to this maritime route can affect its oil exports and the national economy as a whole.

The Strait of Hormuz in Oman faces political and economic instability, mainly due to US concerns over Iran's nuclear programme, as well as occasional incidents of collisions and piracy in the region (Kerr & Katzman, 2018). According to Energy Information Administration statistics, the Strait of Hormuz accounts for nearly 40% of the world's oil exports. Due to the importance of this passage, any control or disconnection would have a major impact on the world economy (Huang et al. 2022).

The United States and Iran have a complex and contentious history in the Strait of Hormuz region, dating back to the late 20th century. This strategic waterway has been a flashpoint for tensions between the two nations since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Mahri, 2020). The revolution marked a turning point in US-Iran relations, transforming Iran from a close ally to a staunch adversary of the United States in the region. Throughout the following decades, the Strait of Hormuz became a stage for numerous confrontations and displays of military might. A particularly tense period occurred in early 2008 when both nations engaged in frequent military exercises in the area. These maneuvers, often interpreted as shows of force, heightened the risk of miscalculation and potential conflict between the two adversaries. The situation was exacerbated by Iran's occasional threats to close the strait, which would have severe implications for global oil trade and international commerce.

However, recognizing the potential for escalation and the negative economic impacts of continued hostility, Iran gradually shifted its approach. In an effort to reduce tensions and avoid further disputes, not only with the United States but also with other Western nations, Iran began to engage in more diplomatic initiatives. This change in strategy involved increased friendly

contacts and dialogue with Western countries, aimed at building trust and reducing the likelihood of military confrontations (Oral, 2012).

Iran has maintained a stance against the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal, and emphasised the need to maintain stability in the Gulf and the Middle East. At present, regarding the nuclear issue. The United States and Iran must be more careful in making decisions to avoid potential conflicts that could affect regional stability. The involvement of these various parties demands diplomacy and collaborative efforts to maintain a balance of interests and prevent unwanted escalation. Avoiding Escalation Through Diplomacy currently, both the United States and Iran face critical decisions regarding the nuclear issue. With growing concerns about regional stability, both sides must act cautiously to avoid actions that could lead to open conflict. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including Gulf nations, European powers, and international organizations, calls for robust diplomacy and collaborative efforts to maintain peace in the region. Preventing escalation in the Strait of Hormuz is essential to maintaining the balance of interests and ensuring the security of global energy supplies.

**Table 1.** Key Incidents in U.S.-Iran Relations in the Strait of Hormuz

Year	Event	Outcome
1979	Iranian Revolution and U.S. Embassy Crisis	Breakdown of U.S – Iran relation
1988	U.S. Navy shoots down Iran Air Flight 655	290 civilians killed; increased tensions
2008	Military confrontation in the strait	Close encounter but no military escalation
2015	Iran signs JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)	Eased sanctions, reduced tensions in the region
2018	U.S. withdraws from JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)	Reimposed sanctions; increased regional tensions
2019	Seizure of oil tankers by Iran	Escalation of U.S.-Iran military posturing in the Gulf

(Source: Mahri, 2020; Oral, 2012)

### Geopolitical Dynamics in the Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most critical chokepoints in global maritime trade, located between Iran and Oman, is one of the most strategic shipping lanes in the world. This strait connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, making it the main gateway for oil exports from the Persian Gulf countries. As mentioned by Gaulier & Zignago (2008), the Persian Gulf region encompasses several nations, namely Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These countries collectively form the coastal states surrounding this strategically important body of water.

Shepard & Pratson (2020) affirm the vital role of the Strait of Hormuz as one of the most strategically significant chokepoints for global energy trade. The strait is a narrow passage that connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean. It is particularly crucial for oil-exporting nations in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, whose oil exports pass through this strait. The significance of this maritime corridor is underscored by the volume of oil that flows through it daily, making it a focal point for international energy markets and geopolitics. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (2021), approximately 21% of global oil consumption, amounting to around 21 million barrels per day, transits through the Strait of Hormuz. This figure highlights the immense global dependency on this single chokepoint. For countries in Asia, such as China, India, Japan, and South Korea, the strait is particularly crucial, as they are the largest consumers of the oil exported from the Persian Gulf region. The Strait of Hormuz, therefore, plays a central role in sustaining global energy supplies and maintaining stable oil markets. In the context of global oil trade, the Strait of

Hormuz surpasses other major maritime chokepoints in terms of the volume of oil transported. While other chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and the Bab el-Mandeb are also critical, none carry the same proportion of global oil supplies as Hormuz. The following table shows the volume of oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz compared to other maritime chokepoints.

**Table 2.** Volume of Oil Passing Through The Strait of Hormuz

Maritime Chokepoint	Oil Volume (Million Barrels Per Day)
Hormuz strait	21
Malaka strait	16
Suez Canal	5.5
Bab el-Mandeb strait	4.8
Danish strait	3.2
Turki strait	2.9
Panama Canal	0.8

Source: (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2004).

This data affirms the position of the Strait of Hormuz as the most important maritime chokepoint in global oil trade. The economic significance of the Strait of Hormuz has made it a focal point in regional and global geopolitical dynamics. As indicated by Majdin et al. (2023), the vulnerability of this strait to internal and external threats continues to be a major concern for various stakeholders.

The history of conflict in this region, as delineated by Owen (2008), demonstrates that threats to energy security in the Strait of Hormuz are not a novel phenomenon. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), particularly the 'Tanker War' phase (1984-1988), serves as a tangible example of the risks faced by vessels traversing this strait (O'Rourke, 1988). Furthermore, the First Gulf War (1990-1991) illustrated the impact of regional conflicts on global energy markets. Talmadge (2008) notes that during this conflict, world oil prices nearly doubled due to the risks faced by tankers carrying fuel exports from both belligerent nations.

In recent years, tensions in the Persian Gulf region have persisted, with significant implications for global energy security. According to a report from the International Energy Agency (International Energy Agency, 2023), security incidents in the Strait of Hormuz have caused notable fluctuations in oil prices. Given the risks associated with dependence on the Strait of Hormuz, many countries have endeavored to diversify their energy transportation routes. As per a study by Kerr & Katzam (2018), several Gulf Arab states have developed alternative oil pipeline infrastructure to reduce their reliance on the Strait of Hormuz.

For instance, Saudi Arabia has operationalized the East-West Pipeline, connecting its eastern oil fields to the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea. The UAE has also constructed the Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline, which terminates at Fujairah in the Gulf of Oman, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz (Mills, 2022). Meanwhile, the global trend towards renewable energy may also influence the long-term significance of the Strait of Hormuz. A recent report from the International Renewable Energy Agency (2023) indicates an increase in global investment in renewable energy, which has the potential to reduce the world's dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf in the long term.

### Challenges and Threats in the Strait of Hormuz

In addition to these geopolitical security challenges, shipping through the Strait of Hormuz is also at risk from security threats such as theft and extortion. A prime example of this risk is maritime piracy, which poses a particular threat to navigation through the Strait of Hormuz as these incidents largely occur in international waters, are perpetrated by non-state entities, and

there is no single agency responsible for oversight (Middleton, 2008). Between 2008 and 2011, most piracy originated from Somalia and spread to the Arabian Sea beyond the Strait of Hormuz.

This situation prompted the international community to recognise that maritime piracy is an ongoing threat to international trade, arising from long-term institutional failures (Knops, 2012). In 2019, a series of maritime incidents escalated international tensions, particularly between Iran and several other nations, with the United States at the forefront. These incidents involved explosive attacks on two oil tankers: one sailing under the Panamanian flag but owned by a Japanese corporation, and another registered in the Marshall Islands but under Norwegian ownership. These events significantly heightened geopolitical tensions in the region (Mackintosh et al. 2019). The United States claimed that Iranian armed forces were responsible for the attack on the oil tanker, but Iran denied the allegations. In response to this disagreement, the United States issued the "US Central Command Statement on Operation Sentinel," which aims to "*strengthen maritime stability, ensure safe shipping lanes, and reduce tensions in international waters throughout the Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and beyond.*"

For example, the spike in piracy in Somalia was attributed to the country's drought and economic conflict (Ploch et al. 2011). It is reported that such failures can reduce trade by more than one independent tariff policy (Anderson & Marcouiller, 2002). International maritime police efforts in the Arabian Sea have successfully reduced piracy attacks in the area (Tominaga, 2016), although attacks have increased again in recent years (International Maritime Bureau, 2018). In the context of energy security, Wu et al. (2009) argue that piracy is a major threat to crude oil imports. In the Strait of Hormuz, piracy reflects what we might call a soft form of trade restriction. In contrast to the harsher restrictions possible in the form of military blockades. While such hard restrictions may directly affect the entire trade, the impact of soft restrictions on trade may vary depending on the type of goods involved in Hormuz (Shepard & Pratson, 2020). Consequently, to ensure uninterrupted maritime traffic through the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz and to safeguard the diverse interests of nations involved, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This approach should encompass timely early warning systems to detect and mitigate potential political tensions before they escalate. Furthermore, it is crucial to progressively enhance international coordination mechanisms, fostering open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving among stakeholders. By prioritizing diplomacy, transparency, and mutual respect for sovereign interests, the international community can work towards maintaining stability and ensuring the free flow of global trade through this critical maritime chokepoint (Huang et al. 2022)

## CONCLUSION

The Strait of Hormuz is a crucial maritime *chokepoint* for the global transport of energy, especially oil, from the Middle East to world markets. Geographically, it separates Iran in the north from the Arabian Peninsula in the south, representing a strategic crossroads where geopolitical and maritime security interests converge. The political, economic and security dynamics in the region have profound implications for regional stability and global trade. Historically, the Strait of Hormuz has seen frequent international tensions, such as the Iran-Iraq conflict and more recently between Iran and the United States over the nuclear programme. Threats to maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz stem not only from potential military conflict, but also from threats such as piracy and the economic risks associated with trade disruptions. The importance of the Strait of Hormuz in the global economy cannot be overlooked, with around 20 per cent of global oil trade travelling through it each year.

This points to the need for international co-operation in ensuring the security of this maritime route, as well as the need to mitigate against risks that could potentially disrupt global

energy trade. In conclusion, the geopolitical dynamics in the Strait of Hormuz have far-reaching and complex implications for regional stability and the global economy. Efforts to maintain maritime security in the region require strong interstate coordination, adherence to international law, and effective strategies in addressing diverse threats. Only with a comprehensive multilateral approach can the Strait of Hormuz continue to serve as a safe and stable global energy trade route for a sustainable future. In order to maintain the smooth passage through the Strait of Hormuz and the interests of the various countries involved gradually improve international coordination and punishment mechanisms to avoid possible conflicts.

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