



كلية الآداب والعلوم
College of Arts and Sciences
QATAR UNIVERSITY جامعة قطر

مركز دراسات الخليج
Gulf Studies Center

**Iran Hormuz Peace Initiative and the Neighboring Countries:
The Helsinki Model
Mahjoob Zweiri – Muyassar Suleiman**

**Gulf Insights Series
Nº 11 – November 2019**

Iran Hormuz Peace Initiative and the Neighboring Countries: The Helsinki Model Mahjoob Zweiri – Muyassar Suleiman

Introduction

In his speech before the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani put forward what he called [Iran Peace Initiative in the Persian Gulf Area](#), unveiling a proposal for regional security called “[Hormuz Peace Endeavor \(HOPE\)](#)”; aiming to achieve progress and welfare at several levels - economic, political, social and cultural, establish cordial relations and launch a collective action mechanism towards securing energy supplies and free navigation in Hormuz Strait, the most vital and salient route for all Gulf states. This initiative coincides with US efforts to build a coalition to protect navigation in Hormuz Strait and the Gulf, which was against the backdrop of allegations made by USA, KSA, Britain, France and Germany that Iran and the Revolutionary Guard are to blame for attacks on oil tankers in Fujairah Port, Sea of Oman and oil facilities on May 12, 2019.

According to the Iranian President's statements, the not yet officially declared initiative seeks collective cooperation within the Gulf region to achieve regional security, without seeking help from those outside the region. Iran - which is to submit its document to the UN according to Iranian statements - assumes that through this [initiative](#) there would be cooperation and coordination with all states in the region. Iran also refers to multiple objectives of this initiative. The aim of the initiative goes beyond its first goal, maintaining security, and takes into consideration other issues such as the economic, social and cultural domains. Iran sees this initiative as

important and considers it with a high level of seriousness, believing that Hormuz Peace Initiative represents a solution for regional problems and a restoration of stability and peace for the entire region and the world. The Iranian speech on the need for regional cooperation between neighboring countries is nothing new. Iran has reiterated a need for a cooperation initiative with the neighboring countries since early 1990s, as part of adopting a policy of coordination with neighboring countries and easing tension through enhancing bilateral cooperation. In the same vein, Iran also issued an initiative to form a security coalition with countries bordering the Hormuz Strait to ensure navigation security, which clearly seems to be associated with certain events and developments on the ground that are liable to change. Through issuing the Dialogue among Civilizations project, an initiative of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in 2001, stresses the necessity of enhancing dialog among civilizations through various means and the importance of continuing the [Dialog among Civilizations](#) at the international, cultural and media levels and through the future of humanity through existing international relations, future outlooks, current cultural state and the social and ethical state in the world. Despite the global appeal and interaction that the Dialog among Civilizations project garnered with different countries, including European ones, its outcomes did not last long, since political stances, being the crux of world struggles, did not change. The culture of antagonism, hostility and sanctions on Iran continued to entirely and evenly impact

the political atmosphere in the Middle East, including the Gulf region.

On his part, Iranian Foreign Minister [Mohammad Javad Zarif](#) talked about some details of the Hormuz Peace Initiative, saying “Iran’s suggestion is to form a coalition of Gulf states; i.e. Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE and Sultanate of Oman, under the auspices of the UN, to ensure Gulf security.”

The timing of the proposed Hormuz Peace and Hope Initiative seems remarkable, since Iranian policies face regional and international criticism in light of its foreign policy and its nuclear program. Such matters disturbed its relations in the region and the world. For example, Iran-Saudi Arabia relations are undergoing a challenging phase accompanied by hostile rhetoric from both sides, in addition to the Iranian circumstances, namely, the continuation of ever-escalating sanctions by the US. Meanwhile, there is no sign of cooperation from any European power in order to mitigate these sanctions.

Iran links this initiative to paragraph 8 of the [Security Council Resolution No.598](#), using it as a legal basis, since the resolution(598) was the one under which the Islamic Republic of Iran accepted the cessation of war between Iran and Iraq in 1988. Paragraph 8 of this resolution asserted the necessity of striving to provide enhanced regional security and stability through consultations with Iran, Iraq and other regional countries, given the Iranian-Iraqi war witnessed an expansion in tanker wars, including oil tankers of other countries passing through the Hormuz Strait.

The Helsinki Model

The cooperation model Iran endeavors to promote through the Hormuz Peace Initiative looks similar to

the [Helsinki Initiative](#). This initiative indicates the importance of accelerating regional cooperation and pioneering activities in education, economy and investments, especially those aiming to encourage communities’ involvement as a major driver of growth at the European regional level, and focuses on the idea of establishing a fund that contributes to the development, investment, and innovation of the initiative states. In a nutshell, it can be said that Helsinki means [The Smart Region](#) as its purpose is to work on establishing common development platforms in economic, political, social and cultural spheres. There is a special focus on the cultural one through [paying attention to activities](#) in order to provide a platform for discussion, cooperation, and coordination between the policies adopted by the regional states. This in turn will be reflected in promoting the communities’ role, enabling their well-functioning, and reducing conflicts and tensions.

This initiative targets policy makers, leaders, universities, research institutions, research funders, libraries and researchers; the approach here is centered around the targeted community, i.e. decision-makers, as well as the idea of enhancing communication and research channels to achieve joint cooperation at the macro level "region-wide"; thus meaning cooperation at the level of the regional system structure among the region’s states.

Hormuz Initiative and Future Scenarios

Any talk of whether or not such an initiative will succeed should take into consideration the circumstances under which it emerged. It is known that the prevailing state of the political divide of Iran's regional relations was one of the most important reasons for the

emergence of such initiative. It can be argued that Tehran is trying to take advantage of international law and institutions such as the United Nations to pass such an initiative, resembling what happened before in the initiative of the Dialogue Among Civilizations. The aforementioned political divide atmosphere has been, and is being, reflected directly in the economic conditions within Iran. Arguably, the importance of this initiative for Iran lies in the potential for a form of economic integration with the Gulf states so as to maximize the benefit for the Iranian economy and overcome the consequences of economic sanctions imposed by the USA, as well as ongoing, limited sanctions by the European states.

The past four decades indicate that cultural, social and economic relations between Iran and its regional neighbors have not yielded a real improvement in political relations, or even security coordination. This does not negate the existence of some exceptional cases between Iran and Oman or Iran and Pakistan, but the general context indicates a state of distrust in Iran's relations with its neighbors. Despite cultural commonalities such as history or religion that should have achieved some sort of convergence, the regional states view such commonalities as tools Iran is trying to exploit in order to strengthen its influence and hegemony in the region. The reproduction of the Helsinki Cooperation Initiative content and ideas may discount the state of the political context and the constant reality of confrontation in the region that the Helsinki Initiative states have been able to overcome. Therefore, the peace initiative ideas may not lead to a fundamental change if not accompanied by a change in political discourse and the reduction or

marginalization of external players' role, which seems impossible.

Political developments in the Gulf region, Arab region, and even the Islamic world, have shown that joint action has not achieved the minimum level of promoting cooperation among the member states of these regional organizations. Thus, the joint action of organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, did not achieve the interests of such peoples under these regional organizations, despite the unprecedented number of commonalities and interests shared by member states. Examples include, a blockade imposed on Qatar in 2017 by three GCC countries (KSA, UAE, Bahrain) and another Arab country (Egypt). Kuwait was militarily invaded as well by Iraq in 1990. All of these events emphasize that political interests and cultural commonalities were not sufficient to urge member states work towards fostering the culture of dialogue, discussion, coordination and respect for their different orientations in order to preserve common interests.

The talk about cultural, artistic or economic cooperation as shared by communities in the region cannot take place in separation from the state's role "i.e. governments' role", as the key player. The success of such cooperation depends on the nature of the state or government in the region, which holds the reins of all economic, social and cultural facets. Thus, any project to change the status quo must pass through the channels of such governments. Therefore, in the presence uncertainty between governments or a level of antagonism, as well as the absence of real development in some countries and a growing gap between society and the state, along with the interactions of the

internal political scene that reflect a state of instability, the possibility of achieving levels of cooperation in the cultural, social and economic fields seems almost limited, if not impossible.

About the authors:

Mahjoob Zweiri is an Associate Professor of Contemporary History and Politics, and Director of the Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University.

Muyassar Suleiman is a PhD student at the Gulf Studies Program, Qatar University.

About the Gulf Insights series:

The "Gulf Insights" series is published by the Gulf Studies Center on a weekly base with the aim to promote informed debate with academic depth. The Gulf Insights are commentaries on pressing regional issues written by the GSC/GSP faculty, staff and PhD and MA students, and they can be between 1,200 to 1,500 words.

All articles published under "Gulf Insight" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University.