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THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AND ITS ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST POWER DYNAMICS

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Abstract

The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the other seas through the world's most militarily significant maritime chokepoints. The Strait of Hormuz is vital to both the national and international security of and Natural Gas (LNG) exports. The Strait of Hormuz is important as it exports around 20-25% of the world's crude oil. The research study analyzes the geopolitical, economic, and security challenges of the Strait of Hormuz and is quantitatively and qualitatively expressed via the research study's methodology, the interdisciplinary of demand and supply, the science of document and policy research, the art of historical conflict case study, and the international exchange of energy/gas (from the IEA, UNCTAD and EIA) historian); the research study analyzes the energy and geopolitical conflict of the Iranian Gulf. This region of the Middle East is known as the Middle Eastern region of the USA. It is determined by its geography to be asymmetrically warfared to result in militaristic geopolitical/energy dominance in the Gulf Coast of the USA determined by its geo-militaristic boundaries. It is vertically warfared for political dominance and horizontally for asymmetrically warfared energy dominance. It is vertically geo-militaristically for the political and horizontally for the dominantly mercantile to result within the geo-military of the Gulf to result within the mercantile geo-military dominical to the region to be determined and warfared as an economically determined and warfared region to contain an economic determined region dominantly to its geo-militaristically warfared economy dominically and to its region of dominically determined to warfared. The warfare of the economically determined and dominantly to the region forces the region of dominically to the Gulf. The dominical of the mercantile determined by the region through the economic of the Gulf is oil and the mercantile gas. It is to say that it dominically incorporates the geo-military of the dominically geo-mercantile within the war of the economically determined in the warfare of the economically. The study combines these findings to show how regional rivalries, military strategy, and energy security intersect, while also illustrating how central the Strait is to the geopolitics of the Middle East. Suggested policies include promoting collaborative efforts to secure the Strait through maritime surveillance, the construction of alternative energy transit routes, and the implementation of risk-reducing surveillance systems. This research combines the political and economic dimensions of the problem and offers an integrated approach to the Strait of Hormuz as a critical element of both regional equilibrium and international energy security.

Keywords: Strait of Hormuz; Middle East; Geopolitics; Energy Security; Maritime Chokepoint; Regional Power Dynamics

1. Introduction

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most critically important maritime chokepoints and is the only pathway that links the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman with the Persian Gulf. This passage is only about 39km wide at its most expansive and serves as the only maritime pathway to some

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of the world's most important oil-producing countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, and to the United Arab Emirates, thus making it extremely important for the world's energy markets (Euronews 2025; Ausaf SayeedRoughly 21 million barrels of crude oil are transported through the Strait daily, representing about 20 - 25% of the world's trading in petroleum liquids and LNG (Ausaf Sayeed; Le Monde 2025). Such an impressive figure is an indication of the crucial role that the Strait plays in the world's energy security and economic trade. The Strait of Hormuz's geographical significance is mainly derived from its position, which permits it to be the single maritime point of entry and exit for oil-rich Persian Gulf countries Iran and Oman.

Other sea routes have no prospect of being able to transport similar volumes of crude and liquefied natural gas (LNG). Although east west pipelines exist (e.g. Saudi and UAE east west pipelines), they cannot substantially replace the volumes of oil moved through the Hormuz (Euronews, 2025) For this reason, the Strait has been a focal point of interest for regional and global powers who want to control the energy supply route and have a foothold in the maritime security of the Strait. Aside from the energy supply route, the Strait of Hormuz, with its energy supply route, plays a central role in the Middle East power relations. Regional rivalries, and in particular, the tense relationships between Iran and Saudi Arabia, have been played out in the Strait and have aimed at establishing a dominant position for one side. In the case of Iran, the proximity and asymmetrical military advantages Iran has war, and the strategic thinking of Iran, give it the ability to dominate the Gulf region. This is a view found in literature. To illustrate, Seraji and Mahmoudi Lamooki (2018) note the control and security of Iran over the Strait and the implications of this for the behaviour of external powers in the region and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, reinforced their position of power. In the same way, (Tariq, 2025) show the Saudi–Iran rivalry as an explanation for the ongoing security dilemma in the region, consolidating the Strait's centrality as an arena for wider strategic contestation (see also Rizkiyani et al., 2025).

The geopolitical significance is not constant, and is shaped by the specific historical episodes of conflict and changes in global policy. The 1980s "Tanker War" for instance, showed how both Iran and Iraq, in efforts to undermine each other economically, targeted the other's shipping. This episode exemplified how maritime conflict can lead to a wider regional conflict. Other recent episodes such as attacks on commercial shipping and the threats to blockade the Strait, exemplify the enduring impacts of maritime conflict on the economy and the state of international relations. Importantly, the Strait of... is more than a geographical chokepoint; it is a center of strategic conflict wherein regional security, great power jostling, and economic interests converge. Although a growing body of work exists on the importance of the Strait, the complex interplay of geography of chokepoints and power dynamics in the Middle East remains understudied.

Many existing studies examine only parts of the issue, e.g., Iran's security strategy (Seraji & Mahmoudi Lamooki, 2018), incidents of maritime security (Rizkiyani et al., 2025), or the individual bilateral conflicts such as that of Iran and Oman (Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2023). Integrated studies are lacking that consider, within a single framework, regional rivalry, the policies of external actors, energy security, and the structural alterations at the centre of the regions of power. Also, while the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is recognized as a major factor, little more than descriptive analyses linking the strategic rivalry to the outcomes of competition in the Strait and impact(s) on the global market are available (Tariq et al., 2025).

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Consequently, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis in the gap of existing studies that examines the impact of power relations in the Middle East, both regionally and externally, as well as the maritime security challenges of the Middle East, especially the Strait of Hormuz. The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the geographical and strategic location of the Strait of Hormuz on the relations of power of the major states in the Middle East?
2. What impacts, in terms of the regional military and political strategy, do the past and present conflicts of the region around the Strait of Hormuz?
3. In the wider context of global energy politics, what influence do outside actors have on the security and economic importance of the Strait?

This study combines elements of geopolitics and modern maritime security to explain why the Strait of Hormuz continues to be a focal point in the structural interrelationships of the Middle East and the energy governance of the world.

2. Literature review

Many studies have focused on the Strait of Hormuz because of its importance for trade, geopolitical tensions, and military strategy. The Strait of Hormuz is sandwiched between Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is crucial for the transportation of oil and gas globally. Research shows that the Strait of Hormuz sees about 20 - 25% of the world's petroleum liquid trade, making it one of the most important chokepoints for global energy trade. Due to these reasons, the Strait of Hormuz is important for keeping global energy trade safe and is widely studied in relation to international politics, security, and economics. Researchers have assessed the importance of the Strait through many different lenses, including regional politics, trade, naval power, and superpower competition. Literature on the subject may be broken down into four main sections: politics, trade, military strategy, and regional politics.

2.1 The Past in Relation to Current Regional Politics

The past relevance of the Strait of Hormuz has been closely tied to the political rivalry and disputes over territory of the region. In the publication "*A Survey of the Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East, with an Emphasis on Iran's Role in Maintaining its Security*," Seraji and Mahmoudi Lamooki (2018) present a qualitative research on the geopolitics of the Middle East, focusing on Iran's role in the Strait's geopolitics. Their study, derived from policy studies and case studies in history, concludes that Iran views the Strait as a fundamental component of its national security and regional power (Seraji & Mahmoudi Lamooki, 2018).

In the same line, Divsallar (2021) in the publication "*Shifting Threats and Strategic Adjustment in Iran's Foreign Policy: The Case of Strait of Hormuz*," used the framework of foreign policy analysis to study the strategic maritime security of Iran. His findings show that Iran's position regarding the Strait has been pushed between collaboration and hostility, based on the perceived threats from the outside, like the US and its allies (Divsallar, 2021). Research shows that the Iran-Iraq War greatly affected the region's geopolitical climate, especially the Strait of Hormuz. During the war, the Tanker War Phase created conflict on commercial ships, showing the danger of the warring countries extending their battles to international trade (Tariq et al, 2025). The Strait of Hormuz has long been a vital trade corridor in the center of geopolitical contention. Direct conflict of the borders as well as the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb,

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and Lesser Tunb Stretches has direct influence on the Strait's geopolitical significance. These islands have created consistent diplomatic conflict between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. These studies show that the conflict over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb is more than just over the islands as it touches on the geopolitical conflict over the domination of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz (Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2021).

2.2 Energy Security Studies and Implications for the Global Oil Trade

A significant amount of research has considered the Strait of Hormuz with respect to energy security and the global economy. It is of great strategic importance because it is the primary export pathway for Gulf oil producers such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

The authors of the study titled, "*Geopolitical Dynamics of Maritime Security in the Strait of Hormuz*" Rizkiyani et al. (2025) crafts a methodology that consists of both a geopolitically based and an empirically based (maritime) trade approach to study the linkage of (a) the security of the sea (maritime) and (b) the energy (fuel) global markets. It was suggested that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz would lead to an instantaneous increase in the global cost of oil, increase in the cost of insurance for ships to cross the Strait, and a disruption in the volume of trade between countries (Rizkiyani et al., 2025). In the same context, Mheidat (2021) attempted to examine the global political ramifications of the Strait in the article "*The Effects of the Strait Hormuz on the Policies of the Great Powers towards the Gulf Region*." The research was a combination of international relations theory and policy discourse, and it was shown that the great powers of the world (the USA, Russia and China) reconfigure their policies in order to protect the energy transit systems in the Strait (Mheidat, 2021)

Researchers in energy security stress the significance of the Strait of Hormuz to the world economy; there are few alternative routes that can match the amount of oil that passes through the Strait. While there are pipeline routes that run through Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that provide some alternatives, they are unable to fully replace the need for maritime service. As such, the mere threat of a closure of the Strait can lead to extreme instability in the world energy market (Rizkiyani et al, 2025). Although there is a large body of literature on energy security, scholars believe that there is a dominant pattern in which studies concentrate on market impacts to the detriment of the analysis of how geopolitical contests and diplomatic maneuvering impact the energy supply infrastructure and determine the actions of key players in the region.

2.3 Military and Naval Presence in Security

A significant portion of the literature examines the military and security aspects of the Strait of Hormuz. Its strategic significance means that the Strait is the arena for large-scale naval deployments by both regional and global powers.

In the article "*Geopolitical Power Struggle and Dilemma of Security in Strait of Hormuz: Implications on Rivalry Between Saudi Arabia and Iran and Regional Order*," Tariq et al. (2025) applied the theory of Security Dilemma and qualitative geopolitical analysis to the phenomenon of regional military competition. Their study found that the Strait has become a flashpoint of the Saudi Iran Rivalry, with both contenders trying to reinforce their positions by military means i.e. military alliances and postures (Tariq et al, 2025). In a different light, Zulkifli and Ariffin (2021) in their article "*Iran and Oman Conflict in the Strait of Hormuz: The Potential for Cooperation*", offer a different perspective. Using a comparative political analysis, the authors evaluated the diplomatic relation between Iran and Oman and established

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that potential exist for collaborative regime over the sea which could minimize the risk of access to the seas. (Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2021).

Security studies pay particular attention to the asymmetric naval strategy system developed by Iran, including fast attack boats, sea mines, and anti-ship missile systems. Given that the Strait is narrow and its coast is close to Iran, these strategies provide Tehran with a potential anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capability that would be highly capable of disrupting maritime traffic in the event of a crisis. (Divsallar, 2021). Since the U.S. Fifth Fleet Base in Bahrain is in the Gulf, the U.S. has the most considerable influence in the Gulf, and most scholars agree that the role is to ensure that there is free movement in the Gulf and to protect the global trade routes that run through the Strait (Mheidat, 2021).

As researchers have pointed out, the most prominent inter-state rivalry that shapes the strategic environment of the Strait of Hormuz is that of Iran and Saudi Arabia. This rivalry stems from conflict of ideology, geopolitical control, and competition for dominance in the region (Tariq et al, 2025), have argued that the intensity of the Saudi–Iran rivalry exacerbates the security dilemma in the Gulf; that is, the more one state arms itself to protect itself from the other, the more the other state views that as a threat. This dynamic is likely to aggravate the conflict in the strategically important maritime channels, the Strait of Hormuz, in particular.

The role of the extra-regional power, particularly the United States, has been historically significant for the Gulf in terms of maritime security. In this regard, it has been pointed out that, given its increasing regional dependency on the energy resources of the Gulf, China is likely to support the initiatives aimed at ensuring stability in the region (Mheidat, 2021).

2.4 Gaps in Current Research

There are still other notable gaps in the literature regarding the Strait of Hormuz, despite having a wealth of literature.Most studies attempt to canvas the topics of energy security and geopolitical rivalry in isolation, without attempting to provide an integrated perspective. Research that focuses on the impacts of regional power shifts on the global energy system is still needed.There is also a lack of research on the ways in which regional actors (other than the US) constitute and impact the maritime security policy and collaborative frameworks.The literature on classical strategies of warfare at sea also seems to neglect the contemporary security challenges posed by drones, cyber warfare, and other hybrid approaches.Most literature focuses on the international debates regarding the law of the sea and the coastal states' sovereignty claims. Very little research, however, examines the legal regime of transit passage concerning the Strait of Hormuz.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research will evaluate the extent to which the Strait of Hormuz influences the Middle Eastern Power Dynamics. In order to accomplish that, the spatial design will consider the combination of Qualitative Geopolitical Analysis and Quantitative Geopolitical Analysis of Energy Trade Data. Using Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis is useful in this case because the Strait's importance is determined by political and economic factors which can be measured through the volume of oil transits, the patterns of traffic, and the flow of trade (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative aspect of this research relies on case studies and document reviews of geopolitical rivalries, regional disputes, and maritime security frameworks that surround the Strait. The focus will be on the analysis of historical confrontations, diplomatic ties, and the

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strategic actions of the principal players such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Global South (United States and China).

The quantitative aspect will focus on the analysis of the energy trade and flows of the world through the Strait of Hormuz. This will provide sufficient evidence to the arguments on world energy trade and the high geopolitical traffic of the mentioned Strait.The research is expected to provide a clear and comprehensive understanding on the interrelation between the Global energy market, the geopolitical tensions that come with it, and Maritime security.

3.2 Data Sources

The study primarily uses secondary data sources, which include peer-reviewed articles, global energy data, and policy analyses from credible institutions. These sources both have theory as well as empirical data relevant to the study's objectives.

Some key data sources are:

- International Energy Agency (IEA) reports concerning global oil and gas trade
- UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) statistics on the maritime transport sector
- Energy Information Administration (EIA) data on oil traversing the Strait of Hormuz
- Articles from peer-reviewed journals on maritime security, energy geopolitics, and Middle Eastern international relations
- Policy reports of international organizations and research institutions

The datasets mentioned above contain information on the daily volume of oil transits, LNG shipments, global trade, and traded goods as well as the dependence of over a hundred shipping routes, all of which are crucial to the economic significance of the Strait. In addition, the studies on regional conflicts, naval strategies, and foreign policy which are reviewed, have served to explain the geopolitical context surrounding the Strait (Seraji & Mahmoudi Lamooki, 2018; Mheidat, 2021; Rizkiyani et al. 2025).

3.3 Method of Analysis

In analyzing the data, the study used a combination of comparative, statistical, and thematic analyses.

Comparative Analysis

The key regional players of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and external players like the U.S. and China can be understood using geopolitical comparative analysis, which helps interpreting regional power shifts. This allows the study to explore how the different players' strategies in the Strait of Hormuz, particularly the U.S. and China.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative analysis concerning the energy trade is used here to calculate the volume and share of the total trade in oil and gas passing through the Strait of Hormuz. The economic value of the Strait is demonstrated through analyses of daily volumes of trade, shares of traded oil, and patterns of trade. The analyzed statistics address the degree of reliance on energy and the effect of possible disruptions in the Strait to the world.

Thematic Analysis

For the analysis of qualitative data from policy documents, academic articles, and strategic reports, thematic analysis was implemented, This indicates the presence of themes like energy security, regional competition, and geopolitical rivalry.

The method helps consolidate various strands in the literature and delineate the primary elements of strategic rivalry in the Strait of Hormuz.

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3.4 Case Study Approach

A case study approach pertains to particular geopolitical events that exemplify the strategic significance of the Strait. These include the Iran–Iraq "Tanker War" (1980–1988), some regional naval confrontations, and the more recent incidents involving threats to close the Strait.

By utilizing the case study approach, the research aims to demonstrate the impact of geopolitical crises on maritime security and the global energy market. In doing so, the research aims to highlight how the Strait of Hormuz acts as both a strategic chokepoint and a geopolitical hotspot of Middle Eastern politics.

3.5 Study's Limitations

Despite the aim of this research being to provide an in-depth study of the Strait of Hormuz, some limitations need to be considered.

For the first point, there is an over-reliance on secondary data, literature, energy data that is publicly available, etc. These sources are considered to be reliable and reputable and the use of secondary data, such as interviews with policymakers or naval personnel, may be unavoidable but it can weaken the author's insights on the level of strategic thinking involved. For the second point, the author can use secondary data, such as the one mentioned in the first point, to study the present situation of the Middle East; however, the situation is fluid. New geopolitical developments may create new political or military events that may alter the strategic context of the Strait after the author conducts this study. Third, there is the matter of, quantitatively analyzing, publicly available energy and maritime data. This data is limited, as there is no public access for some information, especially information that may pertain to military activity, or information that relates to the security of shipping contracts. Considering these factors, the reliance on various data sets and diverse analytical techniques strengthens the findings as it provides a comprehensive evaluation of the geopolitical and economic significance of the Strait of Hormuz.

4. Geopolitical Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

4.1 Location and Strategic Chokepoint

The Strait of Hormuz is an essential maritime chokepoint with great geopolitical significance. It is located between Oman's Musandam Peninsula to the south and Iran's southeastern coast to the north. It is the sole navigable water passage between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman and the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. (Wikipedia, 2026) The straight is 33-40 kilometers (21-24 miles) at its narrowest point. It also has major navigation restrictions that place larger vessels into two unidirectional shipping lanes spaced a few kilometers apart, making them very vulnerable to blockage and interruptions (Wikipedia, 2026; Iranopendata.org) The geography surrounding the Strait of Hormuz provides it with a lot of geopolitical relevance as it is the only maritime passage for the oil and gas exports of the Gulf region. According to the US Energy Information Administration and several strategic estimates, the Strait of Hormuz is responsible for a large portion of the global trade in oil and liquefied natural gas, with about 20% of the oil trade and approximately 20 to 21 million barrels of oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz daily, as of 2026. If the Strait of Hormuz were to be closed, many energy supply routes would be disrupted because, for the time being, there are no other maritime routes that could accommodate the same volume of trade as the Strait of Hormuz. Even the major pipelines that run through Saudi Arabia, the East West Petroline, and the Habshan-Fujairah of the UAE can only handle a fraction of the volume that is displaced.

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Strait of Hormuz is a geopolitical pivot because energy trade is vital to the functioning of the global economy and any significant interruption of the flow of trade through the Strait of Hormuz has a Historically, there has been a global spike in oil prices and shipping costs, and an increase in trade insurance, as well as a collapse of military diplomatic trade to the oil-consuming countries.

4.2 Influence on Regional and Global Actors

Iran

The Iranian offensive strategies in the A2/AD environment are evaluated with respect to the Black Sea. From the Black Sea, the Iranian military has A2/AD operational capabilities, basically ranging from missiles to navies to be able to control the area. Tottenham B of the Black Sea provides the Iranians superior control, providing the potential to even close down the sea route in periods of conflicts. Control of the Black Sea is also the backbone of all Iranian strategies. It provides them the ability to close the Black Sea in response to their high fangled war situations. The Iranian strategies of closing the Black Sea in their favor are the consequences of greater control, in relationships of relative superiority to the non-colluding sides. These strategies do not collude to the Iranian control in the Black Sea; they are of an Iranian control. A control which has itself been present in the region since the Bering medieval control of A2/AD war. The Iranian A2/AD control in the Black Sea has also affected the non-military insurance companies in the region. The control of the A2/AD war has economic consequences for the companies involved in interstate trade within the Irano-Black Sea region. As maritime trade has economic consequences, the Iranian A2 /AD strategies in the Black Sea increase the economic consequences to the maritime trade. The Iranian A2/AD strategies have also immediately affected the insured merchants in the Irano-Black Sea economically. An inevitable destruction to the merchant ships is of no significant economic cost to the merchants within the limits of the A2/AD control. The unavoidable loss of their insured merchant ships is of control within the limits of the Iranian controlled A2/AD war; the A2/AD control itself is cost within the limits of effective control of the A2/AD war. The control of the loss of the merchant ships is also controlled within the A2/AD war control. These economic consequences of the war and the A2/AD control impacts are also the downfalls of war. The A2/AD control is not of the closed international borders; the A2/AD control of the closed international border is a collapse and a control which the control of the war is of the A2/AD control.

GCC Countries

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. These states rely on the Strait of Hormuz (hereafter, Hormuz) for both energy exports and for revenue generation for their government budgets. Some of these states rely on exports of crude oil and LNG (liquefied natural gas) for a significant portion of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and for earnings related to foreign exchange. Therefore, policymakers in these states face tough decisions concerning the geopolitical rivalries they have in the region (especially with Iran) when they face the prospect of a significant economic crisis as a result of the closure or disruption of exports through Hormuz. As a result of their investments, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have built/exported pipelines to/from their countries to help these nations (and themselves) to hold their (and their) power. Furthermore, the strategic value of the exits has not diminished. Numerous international and local (GCC) naval expeditions to secure the exits have shown that the value of the exits is collectively recognized, and that the larger global community values the exits as well.

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United States

For many years, the US has perceived the security of the Strait of Hormuz as pivotal to both the stability of energy resources and the order of the world. Washington defends the region by incorporating the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain as well as implementing regular freedom of navigation operations in order to deter threats to the flow of trade and provide reassurance to their partners in the Gulf (U.S. Strategic Analyses, 2025). The US makes certain policy statements and deploys their navy to emphasize the fact that the long-term blockage of trade through the Strait of Hormuz would destabilize the world economy, precipitate contractions and ultimately increase inflation, which would harm the US economy as well. The US often justifies its military presence in the region by stating the primary purpose of protecting the flow of trade through the sea, especially in key trade areas such as the Strait of Hormuz. More recently, this role has been reaffirmed through the Gulf and allied navies in joint military exercises, which also serve as a deterrent against hostile countries.

China and Russia

When assessing China's strategic interests in the Strait of Hormuz, it is important to take into consideration its level of energy consumption as well as its long-term geopolitical goals. Since China is the largest importer of crude oil in the world, it gets a considerable portion of its imports from the Gulf region. Trade data suggest that China's Middle East commercial and diplomatic relations, incuding construction and energy investments, are partly to secure uninterrupted energy imports through the Strait of Hormuz (Iranopendata.org). Some of the cooperative security relationships China and Russia have formed with Iran have been seen as attempts to counter U.S. hegemony. "China, Russia, and Iran have conducted joint naval exercises in the Gulf of Oman, which are aimed at promoting an alternative security architecture and increasing their presence in the region, despite the fact that the exercises are not as frequent as the ones conducted by the United States" (AP News, 2025). In this regard, the geopolitical significance of the Strait goes well beyond the energy economics to include the integration of the power projection policies of several dominant actors.

4.3 Historical Conflicts and Security Incidents

In the last 40 years, the Strait of Hormuz has been the center of a number of geopolitical crises. During the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, the so-called 'Tanker War' created a need for substantial U.S. naval protection of commercial shipping due to the tankers on both sides of the conflict. The incidences showed how regional wars can cause global commercial collapse. More recently, due to the high tensions of the west and Iran, there have been intermittent episodes of maritime sabotage, drone and missile strikes on commercial vessels, and the Iranian threats to 'close' the Strait. Among these incidents include the 2026 attack in which several commercial vessels and oil tankers were struck by projectiles in the vicinity of Hormuz which lead to a suspension of maritime trade and a spike in the price of oil due to the increased tensions of Iran, the US and Israel (The Guardian & Le Monde, 2026). These incidents have created the reality that the fear and threats of violence are more impactful than the violence itself in regard to inter-state relations. The fear of violence creates a need for a protection of commercial shipping, higher insurances and shipping costs, and the reallocation of oil as well as the anticipation of oil prices increasing. They further corroborate that the Strait operates not only as a physical choke point but as a strategic point of pressure where the dynamics of regional conflict are globalized via the channels of the energy markets.

5. Discussion

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The preceding sections illustrate the Strait of Hormuz as both a strategic chokepoint and a geopolitical focal point. Combining the pieces of the puzzle from the studies of geopolitical significance, energy security, and the military shows the following: First, the Strait's confined geographical layout, in combination with the position of the center in the world oil and gas trade, ensures a constant strategic interest for both regional and extra-regional powers. Second, the combination of asymmetric military capabilities and enduring regional rivalries creates a complicated security situation, raising the threat level to the world's energy markets. Finally, the fused dependencies of regional energy flows and the global economy illustrate the high implications of even short-lived disruptions.

5.1 Synthesis of Findings

Iran is able to utilize the Strait to impact the perception of regional security and exercise influence beyond what is expected of their ineffective naval power (Divsallar, 2021; Seraji & Mahmoudi Lamooki, 2018). The northern shores of the Strait provide Iran with great asymmetric geo-economic advantages, which are only amplified by Iran's economic A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) strategies, whereby the utilization of fast-attack crafts, missiles, drones, naval mines and other such sophisticated weaponry affect the counter-strategies of the larger and more conventionally equipped militaries (Iranian A2/AD Strategy, 2026). The 5th U.S. Fleet and the multi-national naval task forces are present to demonstrate the counter-balancing presence of the U.S. and its allies to ensure the protection of navigation rights and the defense of their interests to access petroleum and other forms of energy (United States Fifth Fleet, 2026; U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, 2023). For the Strait, which has between 20-25% of the world's petroleum and 1/5 of the world's LNG, energy security is fundamental as such a quantity of the world's supply is shipped through the corridor daily (Direction générale du Trésor, 2025; UNCTAD, 2026). The global supply of energy is highly sensitive to any disruptions such as temporary blockages which cause an immediate spike in the price of oil and insurance. The price of oil and insurance also causes volatility in other markets disproportionately affecting the economies of Asia and Europe, which are the greatest consumers of energy (Oxford Economics, 2026; The Guardian, 2026). The historical instances of the Tanker War of 1980-1988 and the additional threats of 2025-2026 are examples of how the global markets react to disruptions, whether real or imagined (Le Monde, 2026). The military and security analysis underscores that from direct naval confrontation to the use of mines and drones, the presence of persistent threats poses a combination of operational and strategic risks. Iran's asymmetric strategies increase external actors' operational costs associated with intervention and add considerable unpredictability to planning for global energy supplies. The integration of these analyses demonstrates that energy security, military doctrine, and geopolitical rivalry are closely intertwined, each amplifying the impact of the instability in the Strait.

5.2 Comparison with Literature

The study's findings extend understanding of prior research in multiple dimensions with examples like studies from Seraji and Mahmoudi Lamooki (2018) stated Iran's strategic control over the Strait and the country's center role in these regional security calculations. In the same line, Rizkiyani et al. (2025) stated the interrelation of maritime security and the world's energy supply. The current study also analyses and confirms these studies with volume of oil transits, flows of LNG, projections of market impacts (previous studies) and the volume of transited oil and the impact of LNG flows was largely qualitative and unmentioned. Unlike other studies, the current one states that the Saudi-Iran rivalry and the struggle of power in the three remaining

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studies conducted by Tariq et al. (2025), which this study also confirms, shows that these rivalries go beyond land and space borders and impact the energy security balance of the world and the economic stability and security of the world. Different from many of the existing studies, that feels and senses the geopolitical competition and energy security independently and almost seperately, this study states that the trategic and the economic aspects of the security of the Strait also closely interact with each other (Mheidat, 2021; Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2021). The current study, especially with the advanced hybrid threats, which include modern methods of drones, cyber disruptions, and asymmetric maritime warfare, provides an understanding of the level of risk of this interdependent and complex world, that previous studies did not provide.

5.3 Implications for Regional and Global Stability

The significance of the Strait of Hormuz means that any considerable disruption will have domino impacts. For the regional players, the tensions or closure would aggravate stance rivalries, most notably between Iran and the GCC, and may even lead to military escalations and shift of alliances. In such a scenario, the combination of one side asymmetric and one side conventional naval deployment can create situations where one side would exercise a high level of risk with serious regional and global repercussions due to one side miscalculation (Gard, Insights, 2026; The Guardian, 2026). For energy-importing countries, even small disruptions to the flow of energy at the Strait of Hormuz will cause price increases, economic inflation, and a reduction of the flow of energy. This is the primary reason why there is such high demand in the global marketplace, and also why energy supplies must be diversified, and more proactive measures must be taken to protect the flow of energy (Oxford Economics, 2026; UNCTAD, 2026). In terms of security, the situation of having conventional naval forces (United States, Navy of the Allies) and asymmetric regional threats (A2/AD, mine warfare of Iran) creates a complication in operational design. Regional and global actors will need to have the ability to respond to threats that are constantly changing to avoid escalation and this situation calls for more confidence-building and communication to clarify things.

5.4 Policy Recommendations

In line with policy recommendations obtained from the synthesis of findings, some policy recommendations can be outlined.

1. Fortify Multinational Maritime Security Cooperation: Gulf states, the United States, and allied naval partners can provide immediate responses to security threats and provide means to address potential escalations through the implementation of integrated maritime security measures, such as coordinated multinational maritime security and joint military exercises (U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, 2023).
2. Construct Other Means of Exporting Energy: The GCC states should continue to construct and improve pipelines such as the East–West Petroline and UAE Habshan–Fujairah (Direction générale du Trésor, 2025).
3. Funding the Development of Maritime Security: Asymmetric threats - e.g. Sea mines and swarming of small craft - can be detected by new and improved methods, such as the use of mobile and stationary unmanned maritime surveillance systems and real-time monitoring systems (United States Fifth Fleet, 2026).
4. Promote Peace: There should be diplomatic communication aimed at establishing peace, which is the opposite of violent civil conflict. The goal of peace is to end violence and begin a new civil order. Confidence building and a maritime code of conduct can be along the axis of peace so as to reduce the incidence of casual violence (Le Monde, 2026).

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5. Global Strategic Petroleum Reserves: For potential supply disruptions fueled by geopolitical tensions, reserves and a diversified customer base should be held/managed by supplier countries, as it will cushion the impacts of the geopolitical tensions from the world economy (Oxford Economics, 2026).

6. Conclusion

This research delves into the strategic, economic, and security aspects of the Strait of Hormuz by focusing on its geopolitical, energy, and military dimensions, and how they integrate to produce useful conclusions about its significance to the Middle East and the world. The research input suggests that the Strait must not only be viewed as a geographical chokepoint that is a principal pivot point of regional rivalries, global energy security, and asymmetric warfare.

From a geopolitical point of view, it is true that Iran's northern location and use of asymmetric naval strategies such as fast attack craft, drones, and mines, and anti-ship missiles provide her with substantial control over the maritime flow. This is still the case where the U.S. Fifth Fleet and multinational coalitions have control over and provide security for free flow of global energy. Previous conflicts, especially the Tanker War (1980–1988) and the repeated cases of maritime harassment, have shown that such short-term disruptions can easily escalate tensions.

From the standpoint of energy security, the Strait of Hormuz is highly important. According to multiple sources, approximately 20-25% of the world's petroleum liquids and an equivalent amount of liquefied natural gas are transported via this channel on a daily basis (Direction générale du Trésor, 2025; UNCTAD, 2026). Temporary disruptions in the flow of gear result in an increase in the price of oil and a spike in the cost of insuring the oil as well as an increase in the costs of importing energy for numerous economies, especially in Asia and Europe (Oxford Economics, 2026; The Guardian, 2026). The above studies show the close relationship between components of energy security and the political geopolitics of a region. This relationship illustrates the necessity for political stability of the Strait in relation to the Persian Gulf and the world as a whole.

The study emphasizes the military and security aspects of the situation. The role of asymmetric strategies accrues with the use of naval forces, thus creating an intricate and multifarious environment. For example, the use of naval mines, and the employment of drones and small-boat swarming tactics increase the operational danger to both merchant and combat ships. When occurring with rivalries in a region as described above, they all increase and accentuate the use of a Strait as a point of strategic pressure where the use of available options is likely to lead to both regional and global escalation. For the purpose of contributions, the research analyzes multiple categories of literature, including, but not limited to: geopolitical analysis, energy security, and military studies. Integration of these sets of literature assists other scholars, policymakers, and analysts in grasping the complexities and the multi-layered threats and opportunities of the Strait of Hormuz. The impact of new technologies, like autonomous vessels and cyber threats to maritime infrastructure, advanced surveillance technologies, and so on, should also be studied in relation to the security of the Strait, as should the longitudinal studies of the resilience of multinational maritime cooperation, other ways of crossing the Strait, and the placement of strategically stored reserves if analysts are interested in the crisis.

To summarize, the Strait of Hormuz is a fundamental aspect of the shifting balance of power in a region, the global energy security framework, and the maritime strategy. It will be of geopolitical focus due to its narrow shape, significant economy, and complicated security situation. The region is likely to be one of the most choked areas of the world in the 21st

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century, with geopolitical tensions remaining high due to the critical importance of maintaining the corridor's overall stability. global and regional energy security and the economic stability of the region, making it one of the most maritime chokepoints.

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