President Eisenhower described the 'Persian' Gulf in 1951 as the most strategically important area in the world. After forty years that witnessed two oil embargoes, a major revolution and two Gulf wars the judgement still holds water to describe this volatile and turbulent area. In terms of petroleum resources, which is the life and blood of modern industrial society, there is no other group of countries that can match it. The littoral states of the Gulf hold over 60 per cent of the world's known oil reserves. The Gulf also represents a lucrative imports market.

Soviet interest in the region stems from both its geographical proximity to the Gulf and presence of Western rivals over there. This study is an attempt to understand Soviet aims and objectives in the region during the period 1971-1990. It analyses the factors of geography, history and ideology that have shaped Soviet policy towards the countries of Gulf particularly in the context of its global rivalry with the United States.

The discussion begins with an introduction. It first describes the doctrinal foundation - the Marxist Leninist framework as modified by Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev - which has shaped Soviet policy towards the
developing countries. It also takes note of the geo-strategic importance of the region and its significance for the Soviet Union. In the end a brief analysis of historical background of the Soviet policy towards the countries of the region has been attempted.

The second chapter deals with the strategic changes and opportunities which occurred in the Gulf in wake of British withdrawal from East of Suez in 1971. It also deals with the attempts by the regional as well as outside powers, most notably the USSR, to increase their influence in the region, and the response of the Gulf states to these moves.

Chapter three analyses the turbulence caused by the Islamic revolution in Iran and Soviet response to it. The reaction of the Gulf states to Soviet invasion in Afghanistan is also described. It also discusses Soviet policy towards the Iran-Iraq conflict and its relations with the other countries in the area.

The last chapter is an attempt to estimate the extent of change in Soviet policy towards the Gulf region brought about by Gorbachev's "New Thinking". Soviet initiative and role in ending the Iran-Iraq conflict is discussed.
It also examines the reasons and compulsions which led to normalisation of Soviet relations with the Islamic regime in Iran and establishment of diplomatic ties between Soviet Union and the conservative monarchies of the Gulf. The discussion ends with concluding remarks about the major findings of the study.

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