

The importance of reducing tensions in the Persian Gulf region to ensure a successful energy transition

Appearing in the journal Heliyon in February 2021, the article “Climate change: a cause of future conflicts in the Persian Gulf region?” was written by Abdolmajid Naderi Beni, Nick Marriner, Arash Sharifi, Jafar Azizpour, Keivan Kabiri, Morteza Djamali, and Alan Kirman. The authors study the implications of climate change for the Persian Gulf region, in terms of both its environmental and its socio-economic effects. The significant tensions between the countries of the region limit the effects of their adaptation policies, and will only be further accentuated by the consequences of climate change.

#1

The Persian Gulf region is already heavily affected by the effects of climate change. A temperature rise of more than 2°C has already been registered in some parts of the region. The average sea temperature has increased by 1°C since the 1980s, affecting coral reefs. The amount of rain in Syria and Turkey is expected to decrease by more than 25 % by 2050. These changes are leading to significant consequences, including an increase in the number of fires in refineries, increasingly frequent sandstorms leading in particular to the closure of power plants and the threat linked to the rise in sea levels (with 2.85 mm per year on average since 1993). Water resources are sharply declining and the trend is sure to continue: the Shatt-el-Arab, the main source in the region, could be completely dry by 2040; Iraq's groundwater supplies have fallen by 27 % since 2007.

#2

Adaptation to climate change will require a major economic reconversion for economies based on the exploitation of hydrocarbon resources and 98 % dependent on oil and gas. Food security in the region will increasingly be a priority, since the lack of water and the rise in temperatures may well lead to a 30 to 60 % drop in agricultural productivity. Tourism, the future path for the economic development of this region, is certainly increasing (generating income that was multiplied by 30 between 1995 and 2017) but currently only represents 5 % of its GDP. Another prospective future route to development is provided by China with the new Silk Road, for which significant investments in maritime infrastructure have already been made.

#3

These perspectives strongly reinforce the need for a cooperative approach in the face of climate change. Cooperation for water management in the Shatt-el-Arab is essential; its control has often been a source of conflict, particularly between Iraq and Iran. The construction of dams in Turkey and Iran currently constitutes a threat to agriculture in Iraq. To diversify their energy sources, the countries of the Gulf need a transfer of technology and foreign funds, which will be compromised in the event of a conflict. The same applies to the arrival of tourists or the role of new trade routes.

The opinion of Géraud Guibert, Chairman of LFE

In order to successfully phase out fossil fuels from the world economy, the reconversion of the economies of the Persian Gulf is crucial. This requires major efforts from these countries and the international community to resolve conflicts and ensure that a cooperative approach predominates in the region.