THE ISLAMIC AWAKENING IN BAHRAIN AND GEOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PERSIAN GULF

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ABSTRACT

Following the developments in the Middle East and North of Africa, the anti-government protests at the beginning of 2011 gripped Bahrain which led to the aggressive behaviors among the protestors and government forces and these protests are expanding. This crisis had effective geopolitical consequences for regional and trans-regional actors. This study aims to explain the geopolitical consequences of Persian Gulf following the Islamic Awakening in Bahrain using the descriptive-analytical method. The results of the present study showed that, although Bahrain was a part of Iran in the past and the Shia included the majority of its population, formation of Islamic awakening in Bahrain resulted in expanding the influence of Shia geopolitics led by Iran, intensifying the geopolitical conflicts of Iran and Saudi Arabia, threatening against the interests of the U.S.A and finally development of geopolitical structure in the region due to the change in geopolitical weight and range of influence of regional and trans-regional powers in Persian Gulf.

KEYWORDS: Islamic Awakening, Bahrain, Geopolitical Weight, Geopolitical Development, Persian Gulf

Turbulent waves of Islamic awakening since 2011 till now involved the important geopolitical region of the Middle East and North of Africa and exposed this region to huge geopolitical developments and certainly leads to new geopolitical consequences in the structure of regional geopolitics. These developments exceeded the boundaries of countries and the position of other regional and trans-regional countries was effected by these changes and lead to forming the new balance of forces.

In the meantime, due to the specific geostrategic position in geopolitical areas of the Persian Gulf, Bahrain Island is important for regional powers like Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia as the efficient actors and in trans-regional level for the U.S.A as the strategic alliance of Bahrain in which the fifth fleet of United States of American navy in based. Now due to the Islamic awakening in Bahrain and intensifying the hidden latent unrest among the Shia, the public protests increase daily. Intensifying these crisis can lead to geopolitical developments in Persian Gulf.

This article seeks to answer the question that what geopolitical developments can Islamic awakening bring about for the regional and trans-regional powers in Persian Gulf? To answer this question, first the theoretical principles of research, then the most important findings and conclusions are stated.

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH

Geopolitical weight

It means the heaviness of forces and the positive and negative factors effect on the national power of a country and on the other hand, presents sum of factors of national power, geopolitical weight of a country in the countries or the global and regional geopolitical system (Hafeznia; 2006).

Geopolitical developments

It means the changes and developments in patterns, principles and geopolitical structures. The geopolitical developments are dynamic and appear due to the developments in geopolitical weight, structures and function of factors and variables effecting on national and mass power. As the positive and negative roles of power agents are flowing and the political actors and governments are competing and improving their position in regional and global system, so the global geopolitical system is dynamic and follow a kind of dynamic balance. In other words, they reach a kind of dynamic balance beside developments. In addition, the development in a system requires the turbulence and lack of balance. Lack of balance causes development and development brings about progress in system (Cohen; 1994).

Geopolitical Conflicts

Conflict interests and goals are the cases to which the governments have antithetical and non-aligned insights (Hafeznia; 2006). Geographical distinctive features result in diverging behaviors and segregation (Hafeznia and Kavianirad; 2009). Causes of conflict lead to separation of political units and crisis (Taherimosavi; 2008). Also, the conflict interests and goals are the sources of competition, conflict and rebellion among the actors, government and countries. Competition process is formed and will be developed in the face of bilateral or multilateral interaction and coalitions from the aligned states and finally it may lead to the military clash (Hafeznia; 2008). With regard to the developments in Bahrain, both regional powers in Persian Gulf that are Iran and Saudi Arabia have conflict interests and goals which they attempt to
reach to their interests and goals by competition, clash and conflict. These causes of contest and geopolitical conflicts are observed in Bahrain developments and the competition among actors intensifies the crisis in regional Persian Gulf especially Bahrain.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The method in this research, according to the nature of topic, is descriptive-analytical; and the data were collected, documentarily, from the books, articles, websites; and applying the geopolitical maps of Persian Gulf in order to recognize the geopolitical features of regional and trans-regional powers is fundamental in this research.

RESULTS

Islamic awakening in Bahrain

The current revolutions of the Middle East nations should be defined as the blast of political participation due to the lack of efficient social and political organizations to attract the participations under the rule of Arabic authoritarian regimes (Soleimani; 2012). The conflict among the government and public forces is the stimulating factor of domestic policy in regional countries and can influence the great powers (Emami; 2010).

The anti-government demonstrations among some countries in the Middle East at the beginning of 2011 happened in Bahrain, too and led to the aggressive behaviors among the protestors and the governmental forces and police. Inspiring the events in Egypt and Tunisia, the protestors in Bahrain started their demonstrations on February 14. It’s been a long time that the hidden tension among the Shia under the ruling Sunni exists. The Shia protest for descending the high positions in the army and government. The Al-Khalifa forces retreated on February 18 and few days later, thousands of protestors gathered in LoLo square. The number of protestors climbed up on February 22 and more than 100 thousand protestors assembled around square. The huge demonstrations by Democracy advocates continued for three weeks, soon after that, the happiness of protestors came to an end. On March 14, according to the request from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and UAE, have sent two thousand soldiers toward Bahrain in order to break up the protests. Attending the Sunni forces of adjacent country with the majority of Shia inflamed the conflict. Bahrain government put the curfew and implantation of suppressive acts against the opposition at the top of its agenda; these acts include using force for expelling the protestors from LoLo square, search warrant, mass arrests and torture. Declaring the state of emergency, increasing the gap between the government and society and discriminatory policies enforced by Al-Alkhalifa are the main factors of revolution and political protests of the Bahrainis. This gap is rooted historically and the foreign and domestic political-security variables effect on this gap (www.infoplease.com; 2012). In Bahrain the clashes and unrest originated from the revolution in the region (Hil and Gerd; 2011). Looking back the political history of Bahrain suggests that the political structures, status and the special relationship between the government and society in Bahrain, and the political approach of Al-Alkhalifa is the background of every kind of revolution and public protests (Adami; 2012). The nature of political regime in Bahrain is the constitutional monarchy (Mirrazavi; 2004). Certainly, one of the most important aims for the current movement in the Middle East was refining the political structure in order to increase the civic participation and sociopolitical freedom in country (Pillar; 2011). The Shia in Bahrain seeks to change the authoritarian nature of ruling regime and this issue reflects the state of dominated classes. These developments can lead to changing the structure of regimen, increasing the involvement of Shia in running the country and providing opportunities for Iran to play roles which brings about the regional geopolitical developments.

Expansion of geopolitical range led by Iran in Persian Gulf

Following the Islamic revolution of Iran in the region of Persian Gulf and coming out as an independent country and struggling with the superpowers, some developments happened in the region; one of the effects of Islamic revolution was distribution of Islamic insights in the region and Persian Gulf which resulted in Islamic awakening and Islamic-seeking movements which was in paradox of ruling governments (Hafeznia; 2009). As the Islamic revolution happened in the realm of Shia in the world, it effected on the surrounding areas. These processes are observed in three axes of 1) self-awareness of Shia; 2) forming or reinforcing the political parties and organizations; 3) the role played by Shia in the political structure of their countries (Ahmadi; 2010).

Expanding the range of influence of Iran on the basis of religion from other countries brought about the reactions and actions (Ahmadi and Hafeznia; 2010). From the point of view of Arabic governments, the countries around the Persian Gulf were formed to increase the power of Iran and role of the Shia in the Middle East and a Shia crescent was created from Lebanon to Pakistan led by Islamic Republic of Iran (Ezzati; 2010). Form their viewpoint, Iran is trying to increase its power by creating a Shia group in the region and apply it against the interests of Sunni countries and that of Israel and America (Purahmadi and Jmali; 2009). This revolution led to realizing most of the social protests in the region (Valipurzerumi; 2004). Following the Islamic revolution of Iran, Bahrain scared of revolution like many other countries in the region (Hafeznia and Ahmadi; 2009). In 1360, an
unsuccesful coup was done by Shia to suppress the ruling regime in Bahrain (Fazelinia; 2007). This event led to increasing the pressure by the ruling regime on the Shia and stirring the relationship between the Iran and Bahrain; but being effected by the Islamic revolution and politicization, the Shia in Bahrain formed the Islamic party for liberty of Bahrain (Amraei; 2004). In Bahrain, the Liberation Movement which was established under the influence of Islamic revolution and expanded its activities, emphasized on forming the optional parliament. In fact, formation of parliament and drafting the fair constitution in which the rights of majority of Shia were officially recognized was one of the goals of this country (Fuller and Franke; 2005). Also, investigation of the slogans of revolutionist in Bahrain in 2011, suggests dominant Islamic aspect affected by the Islamic revolution of Iran (Abasishlaghi; 2012). Following and continuing the protests by Shia in Bahrain and its expansion beyond the boundaries of this country, especially, Saudi Arabia and awakening of the Shia movements in this region, cause the Shia geopolitics expand and role of Shia on the political affair of Shia countries increase by inspiring the resistance geopolitics, opportunities of playing role by Iran will be seized.

**Intensifying the geopolitical conflicts between Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia**

The range of political-military changes in some Arabic countries has not been limited to political boundaries of these countries and the position and influence of regional countries will be affected by these changes (Ghorbani; 2012). Competition of regional powers to decrease the rivals and their influence on the process of forming governments in Arabic countries are the main challenges in the Middle East (Dehghanifarazabadi; 2012). The public protests in Bahrain caught the eyes of both Shia and Sunni rivals such as Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia considers Bahrain as the Strategic supplement and intervened to suppress the protesters. On the other hand, Iran which ruled on this Island for a long time and has religious similarity with Bahrainis, cannot ignore the events and play its role. The developments in Bahrain cause the geopolitical conflicts happen in Iran and Saudi Arabia, as two powers in Persian Gulf, and both of them use the aggressive strategies to defeat and remove each other. In current years, the concerns and regional competitions between Iran and Saudi Arabia cause the relationship between two countries darken and the diplomatic relationship between them weaken. Saudi Arabia adopted measures in order to struggle against the influence of Islamic Republic of Iran and attempted to improve its position to Iran by solving the problems and crisis in the region and decrease the power and influence of Iran within the unions and regional/trans-regional coalition against Iran (Naderinasab; 2010). Foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia is based on the goals which determine and explain the manner of action of these two countries in the region and beyond (Aghaei; 2010). Intensified conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia result from the policies imposed by the superpowers especially the U.S.A. Following the Islamic Revolution, the political – ideological influence of Iran in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait suggest this issue (Hafeznia and Rumina; 2005). Lack of political maturity leads to depending on the regional and trans-regional powers; for this, the wave of crisis causes the inner tension and instability (Akbari and Nami; 2009). Bahrain has been the chess board of strategic competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Ruhidehbone; 2012). Saudi Arabia built a road between Saudi and Bahrain to make entrance of the armed forces easy in case of chaos and made Bahrain depend on Saudi Arabia (Aghaei; 2010). Saudi Arabia does not wish to support the disorderliness caused by Shia in this country; especially, it is likely that the chaos expand in Shia areas at the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia (Fuller; 2010). Following the occurrence of protest in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia dispatched its armed force to Bahrain with collaboration of with UAE, in order to suppress the protesters.

On the other hand, Iran cannot ignore the events, trying to match the global developments and forming them based on the requests and national interests should be a motivation for geopolitics and universalism in Iran and in order to reach this position, it is essential to be in the center of developments (Mojahedzadeh; 2007). One of the geopolitical distinctions in Iran results from Shia religion (Zeinolabedin; 2007). Geographic distribution of Shia made Iran as Shia territory and this issue justified the sensitivity of this country to destiny of Shia society (Ahmadi; 2010). National security committee of Iran has issued two statements for supporting the Bahrainis uprising and expelling the armed forces of Saudi Arabia (Hajiyousefi; 2012). The close union between the countries of the Persian Gulf is a part of broad strategy to stop the influence of Iran in the region and attempting to create economic, political and military union and joining Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, stand against the influence of Iran (Adami; 2012). In fact, the current tensions between Iran and Arabic countries result from accusing Iran for supporting the Shia in Bahrain to suppress the Sunni ruling regime and Iran’s protest against the military intervene of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain for suppression of protesters (Roberts; 2011). In this regard, different scenarios were written for seclusion of Iran in order to decrease the role of Iran in development of Bahrain. Competition of regional powers in Bahrain led to self-awareness of Shia and made people emphasize on reaching their request and individual and social rights.
Threatening against the interests of the U.S.A in Persian Gulf

Berginsky believe that in every condition that the weakness of Islamic countries leads to social pains, vague hostility to religious brings about the anti America feeling and domestic dissatisfaction or regional conflicts intensified this feeling (Berzezinski; 2007). It’s been for a thousand years that the Middle East geography had been the main factor in determining the military and economical presence in the region and reaching this source (Kemp and Harkavy; 2004). Since the past, accessing to the sea was one of the main factors of expansionism. The marine condition is Island (Ezzati; 2007). All the Island in the world play military roles and geostrategic role of these countries effects on the geopolitical aims. As the time shows, the people resident in an Island, have not perceived their geopolitical conditions and did not show proper reaction in international political scene and they will miss the advantage of dependence and freedom of act soon (Ezzati; 2005). Due to having geostrategic condition, Bahrain as an Island, has been regarded on behalf of the powers and regional and trans-regional organizations; after the Iraq’s invasion to Kuwait and endangering the interest of America in the Middle East, Bahrain has attracted the attention of Americans in order to use this country as a base of supporting the American fighters which headed toward the region to back the Iraqi force away. The relationship between Bahrain and America was formed since 1932 after developing the oil industry in 1948; this country was headquarter of American warships based in Persian Gulf. Navy’s Fifth Fleet Center of U.S.A is based in this country. These fleets play important roles, in this region. The relationship between Manama and Washington reached to its climax in 2001. In this year, George W. Bush, has declared Bahrain as one of the strategic unions (www.aftabir.com; 2012). Bahrain is an ancient Arabic country which started its military coordination with America. Bahrain and America had signed a mutual military contract in 1971, according to this contract, a 40 km² field was handed to America. On July 1973, the current agreement was put at the top of the agenda, on 30 June 1977, it changed. Based on the newly-made contract, U.S navy can benefit from the facilities in Salman Port. Since 1933, the regional headquarter of U.S navy was based in Bahrain and on July 1995, Bahrain was the host of U.S navy’s fifth fleet (www.farsnews.com; 2011). The activity area of this fleet was the Red Sea (Jafariveldani; 2008).

One of the most important strategies of the U.S.A in the region was continuous presence of military forces in Persian Gulf. Continuous presence of U.S military force in Persian Gulf means comprehensive support of its policy and the allies against the developments in Persian Gulf (Ezzati; 2009). Islamic government of Iran struggled against America since its emergence and called it as the biggest enemy (Young; 2005). This revolution causes the most severe hit to the interests of America (Cohen; 2008). After the revolution, the policy of keeping away the foreign powers from the Persian Gulf continued (Minaei; 2007). American military presence in Persian Gulf was the most serious change in strategic environment, so that it changed the balance for the loss of Iran (Khademi; 2005). Presence of America around Iran leads to insecurity and Iran had to consume heavy expenses for national security and removing threats, so the approach of Iran to provide the national security should be regional (Heidari; 2005).

Iran is against the presence of the U.S.A in the region and basing the Fifth Fleet Marine in Bahrain which is the obstacle for Iran to play role in the region, on the other hand, Saudi Arabia demands that the U.S.A forces attend in Persian Gulf and Bahrain to decrease the influence of Iran and keep the stability of the region. If Bahrain which was supported by the U.S.A and was its strategic union leads to changing the structure of governing in increasing public conflicts, the influence of Iran in the region will be increased and the interests of America and its unions will be at risk.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study suggest developments in patterns, principles and geopolitical structures in Persian Gulf due to the changes in geopolitical weight, structure and function of variables in national and mass power of regional powers such as Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia and also trans-regional intervening power that is the U.S.A. These issues approve the dynamic nature of geopolitical development which resulted from the Islamic awakening. The consequences of this geopolitical development were increasing the power and range of Shia influence in Persian Gulf led by Iran and intensifying the geopolitical conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia which both seek to gain opportunities to play role in developments of the Middle East and North of Africa and other consequence of Islamic awakening was threatening and hitting to the interests of America as a union of the present regime of Bahrain in Persian Gulf.

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