



**Analysis of China's role in the Persian Gulf with its Security view of the Country to the Region
(after the Islamic Awakening)**

Hesamuddin Azimifar

Ph.D. Student, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza, Iran.

Mohammad Reza Aqarabparast*

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza, Iran.

Seyed Mostafa Madani

Assistant Professor, Department of Strategic Sciences, Imam Hossein University, Tehran, Iran.

Received: 09, November, 2020

Accepted: 28, December, 2020

Abstract

Islamic awakening is a movement, which has exploited the Muslim nations for many years to return Islam to the social and individual life of Muslims, and in contrast to the international domination system. The evolutions have left abundant effects, and have affected the foreign policy of some countries with political and economic relations with the Middle East countries, especially the Persian Gulf. This study has investigated the role of China in the Persian Gulf with the security view of the country to the region (after the Islamic awakening evolutions). The main question in this study is: what approach was taken by China in the Persian Gulf after the Islamic Awakening evolutions? The results of this study showed that the approach of China to the evolutions of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East has faced a security perspective. The geopolitical and economic interests of China in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf have formed the behaviors of the country against such evolutions. The most important dimension of the geopolitical interests of China can be preventing the regional order in the Persian Gulf from becoming hegemonic. Also, the most underlying dimension of economic interests has can be supplying energy security. According to these interests, China got an impartial position in the Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen crises. In the Libya crisis, China accompanied the International Community and played role in the Syria crisis in contrast to the West and Arab League. The behavior of China against the Islamic Awakening Evolutions was a gradual movement from the margins to the core of crises. China became a key activist in the later crises of the region.

Key words: Persian Gulf Region, Islamic Awakening, foreign policy, China, security.

* **Corresponding Author:** aghareb@yahoo.com

Introduction

The Persian Gulf region and the presence of transregional states in this sensitive region can be very important in terms of national interests and national security. Multiple studies are needed in this field. Because of needing the oil of the Middle East, China tries to solve the crises as a mediating member and tries to take a process in line with evolutions. As the interests of China are depended on the peace and security of the Middle East, the country tries to end the evolutions with the least stress.

Literature

Many studies and books have been published on the aspects and dimensions of the evolutions of West Asia and the role of regional and transregional states in this region. Here, the most important relevant works are presented.

(Camp, 2004: 23), conducted a study under the title of "Strategic Geography of the Middle East". This study showed that the collapse of several Arabic states in 2011 and continuity of protests in Syria and Yemen, and probability of extension to several other states led to the destruction of boundaries of power and identity in the Middle East.

(Saharkhiz, 2009: 4) conducted a study under the title of "Economic Relations between China and the Persian Gulf Countries". The role of national security is vital in targeting China's foreign policy. China has been changed into a conservative activist in line with the current international discipline from the revolutionary and evolution-seeking force in this framework. Although China disagrees unilateralism of America, it never accepts to pay heavy costs to control that.

(Naeini, 2019: 105), conducted a study under the title of "The Concept and Dimensions of Soft Threat in Security Studies". The study showed that China has been changed into an important activist over the years in international affairs. The results showed that China tries to use its progressing, effective, and strong diplomacy to achieve its goals.

Methodology

In terms of purpose, this study is applied research, which has used the qualitative method. In this study, analysis and descriptions have also been presented. Hence, this is a descriptive-analytical study in terms of procedure. Data collection was done using library studies, documents, books, articles, and journals, websites, and searching in internet networks and databases, quarterly, and specialized magazines.

Theoretical framework

The strategies of foreign policy and behavioral patterns

Analysis of the dominant nature of the relations of countries is dependent on recognition of macro policy-making strategies, and their impact on the operational environment. The strategies of the foreign policy of a country are affected by domestic and transnational conditions by accepting the direct relation of the domestic and foreign policy of the states. However, the domestic domain is the source of expectations, needs, and source of foreign policy and strategy determination. The international domain or the transnational environment of states is the environment of limitations of implementing foreign policy. Depended on the mobilization of power authorities and the ability of unification, such foreign restriction can be changed into the actual facility to determine the goals inserted in foreign policy strategies, and pave the way for cooperation or conflict under such conditions.

The anarchic nature of the international system exposes the states to conditions to be responsible against the preservation of security and survival in practice. Neorealists believe that anarchism can result in conflicts in two ways: first, it permits the states to begin conflict under conditions of lack of authority; the second way is the security puzzle. In this way, the states think that they need to empower the foundation of their power under anarchic conditions. Such an effort to gain power would be evaluated in a pessimistic way by other states. Hence, they take the same measure in a reciprocal action, and the conflicts are intensified ultimately.

The impact of domestic and foreign conditions on behavioral patterns can form the relations of countries in such a balanced way so that the relations would not be just based on the cooperation of conflict. According to such determinant approach of conflict and cooperation in the foreign policy, it could be mentioned that can form the behavioral patterns of a state in the lean cooperative or conflicting frames as the attitude of the governments to the foreign domain. The synchronicity of the two processes creates the conditions of changing the relationship pattern continuously. Also, it should be noted that cooperation and conflict are lean frames of relations, and different competitive forms may exist between them (Pirsalami, 2015: 92).

National power and foreign policy

The scholars of international relations believe that the foreign policy of every country is directly correlated to the elements of the national power of that state. To appoint the national power of a country, two groups of factors should be separated: almost stable factors, and those factors, which are always changing.

Geography is the most stable factor that forms the foundation of national power (Morgenthau, 1995: 197). The most important scenes of the deigned policies and strategies include rivers, seas, oceans, hills, plains, and mountains. Natural resources are other stable factors in the field of comparing the power of nations. Food, raw materials, and national resources such as petroleum can be the manifestations of the power of a country. The industrial or technological power in the field of industry, transportation, communications, or agriculture can show the power of a state. Military readiness is in direct correlation with the power of a state. One can refer to the military technology, leadership, quality, and quantity of armed forces as the subsets of military readiness. The population of a country can be also a symbol of national power, although this is not permanent. The distribution of population and the growth of that may be more important than the population. Among the qualitative factors of national power, one can refer to national nature, national spirits, quality of the government and the society, and the quality of diplomacy. It could be mentioned that diplomacy is the thoughtful brain of national power. Similarly, its soul is the national soul. By mitigating its view power, its arbitration power would be disrupted, and its intention would be weakened. All bonuses caused by geographical position, self-sufficiency in foods, industrial manufacturing, military readiness, number, and demographic features can't be usable for the nation in the long term (Maleki, 2013: 58).

National power

The evolutions of the Middle East

The Middle East has been the focal point of the world and maybe the most sensitive region of the world in terms of strategic, economic, political, and cultural affairs since the mid-20th. The region includes the largest petroleum sources and has been the place for the long-term disputes of Arabs and Israel (Kuangyi, 2017: 14). From the beginning of the recent evolutions in the region, especially the first wave of the collapse of reactionary Arab government structures, and some others' preemptive reforms, two approaches were provided on the nature of these events among the political analysts and actors.

The first approach analyzes the evolutions as a popular uprising to gain natural human rights, to return to divine nature, preserve human dignity, and obtain the right to self-determination and social freedom. After some evolutions and distortion of traditional structures of the region and the possibility of change in social-historical relations imposed on the society, the hidden force (with the orientation of young generation of the societies) was activated and took measure

to gain more freedoms and to achieve social expectations. Accordingly, the group of analysts named the regional events under titles such as "Islamic and Human Awakening" based on the awakening of natural desires of free people, and Islamic slogans in the movements. However, there were also secular and non-ideological titles such as "Western Spring" (the interpretation used by westerns). The name was created in line with neutralization and inattentiveness to the belief of revolutionary stream, or the names based on pure emotions such as "Second Islamic Revolution".

The second approach was used to analyze the events from another point of view and believed in the hidden presence of superpowers and the transregional powers to manage the sharp wave of evolutions. Also, this approach believed that the evolutions used to be managed after the formation of "blind uprising" waves and conducting it for purpose of early discharge of the hidden forces at the regional level to prevent more dangerous evolutions, and more fundamental damages to the interests of these powers in the region. The approach confirms that the evolutions are western, American, or Zionist conspiracy. Accordingly, despite the approach of companionship and support of evolutions, the second approach believes in the prevention and lack of companionship with the process of regional evolutions at least. Regardless of any definite opinion on the accuracy of both approaches, one can analyze the field events caused by the "uprising of regional people to change the structures" as the only definition for the slogan "the people want to bring down the regime" in all countries. Regardless of the differences of cultural and social structures of each state, and the role and impact of foreign powers (regional and transregional), and based on a fundamental component of such uprising as popular movements; people can undoubtedly be the main actors of the scene. In general, three major streams can take part among people in these countries far from the different strengths and weaknesses of each stream. The first stream is the secular and pro-western and pro-democracy stream that brings the slogan of freedom to change the traditional social structure combined from educated and technocrat classes, and the new class of the societies. The second stream is formed of traditional Islamist range and extremist streams with regional and transregional Salafi and Wahabi orientations.

The second approach is the Islamist moderate stream, which tries to create a moderate and local way and make structure based on natural requirements of these societies for development in contrast to western modernization and Islamic fanaticism streams (Noruzi, 2013: 216).

The fields, factors, motivations, goals, and future of public movements in the Arab world can be analyzed from various perspectives such as belief and

Quran, history, sociology, politics, cultural, social, and economic points of view. This is because; a good pattern is needed for the expanded social phenomenon so that they can be recognized based on the realities (Ebrahimi, 2011: 67).

Because of cultural background, taking benefit of important territories and economic resources, the Arabic nations tend to obtain advancements in domestic and foreign domains. However, the governors have conducted the state towards militarism with domestic orientation and suppression of the opponents, and have expanded the weapon depots. This is because; they have not recognized the civil and political freedoms by prevention of public participation in decision-making processes, plundering the public wealth, social inequalities instead of relying on the nation. The Arabic governors consume billions of dollars annually for continuing their plunder instead of using the wealth for comprehensive advancements (Khorsandi, 2013: 94).

Analysis of the relationship of China and Arabs

The China relations in the contemporary age

The relationship between China and Arabs has switched to a new age. On one hand, China is rapidly changing into a superpower. On the other hand, this country is showing an increasing need for energy, market, and foreign investment, which has increased the geopolitical influence of the state. Hence, the position of Arabs is redefined in the foreign policy of China in this age. Also, Arab states follow the relations with China with special preference. As a result of such change, the parties have tried to institutionalize and develop the relations. In this regard, the Arab League announced in 2004 as a result of a change in relations of power in the international scene that the league would imitate the plural diplomacy. Naturally, China could get special significance as an emerging power. The most important common innovation of them in the institutionalization of relations of parties was the formation of a China-Arab meeting. In this meeting, 22 members of the Arab League and China gathered together annually to analyze the ways of expanding and deepening the relations. The offer was presented by China in 2004, and the meeting has been held two times to the date with the agreement of the Arab League. In the first meeting, Hu Jintao, President of China, counted four main principles for the development of China-Arab relations:

- 1- Promotion of political relations based on mutual respect
- 2- Making commercial and economic relations with the aim of achievement to common development
- 3- Expansion of cultural exchanges with the aim of mutual learning

- 4- Empowerment of cooperation in the international scene with the aim of preservation of world peace and the promotion of common development (Shabani, 2018:94).

Analysis of the relations of China with the Middle East and the Persian Gulf

The Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf, is very important in terms of China's foreign policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the imposed war of Iran against Iran could pave the way for the presence of China in this region. Currently, China has made a relationship with major states in the Persian Gulf. Also, to have stable relations with Egypt and Turkey in that side of the Middle East, China has made close and comprehensive political, economic, military, and international relations with Israel Regime. China's policy in this region is the result of the outcomes of the leaders of the state from the main element of the Pecan-Washington relations, the evolutions of the Middle East, and domestic evolutions of China. However, the sensitivity and worry of Pecan's leaders about Islam in the center of the Middle East in the Islamic World should not be neglected. The Chinese government pays specific attention to Islamic World according to the minority of Muslims of China and the independence tendencies of Xinjiang Uyghur. It could be observed that China is never happy with the advent of Islam power and integration and the advent of a new pole under the title of Islam; although the state tries to become close to the Islamic states and take benefit of their friendship. Historically, there is no stable relationship between China and the majority of Persian Gulf governments. However, the underlying approach is that the policy of China in the region is not in opposition to the strategy of America due to the role and position of the United States in the Persian Gulf. The relationship of China with all Arabic states of the Persian Gulf has had a growing process over the past ten years. Currently, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the greatest commercial partners of China in the Persian Gulf. China tends to make a kind of interaction at least through using the strategy of power in low degree in the Persian Gulf. In general, China has common opinions with America on guaranteeing the oil stream from the Persian Gulf. As the foreign policy of China has been changed from an ideologic political approach into a political-economic approach over the two decades. It could be mentioned that the relation of China with the Persian Gulf is geoeconomics and not geostrategic relation at the current age. This is n line with the dominant approach in China's foreign policy, and the general process of evolutions in the world progressing toward the promotion of the position of an economy (Talebifar, 2011: 132).

Need of China for energy, and the issue of security in the Persian Gulf

China brings multiple reasons for the development of relations with the Persian Gulf states, the most important of which is oil. Currently, China has the most oil exploitation from the Persian Gulf compared to other states. In 2011, China imported more than 2.9 million barrels of crude oil from the Persian Gulf per day, which could supply about 60% of whole oil imports. In the same year, oil import from the Middle East was about 2.5 million barrels per day, which was about 26% of the whole oil imports of the state. However, it should be noted that most oil imports of the United States have been through the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. However, China was highly dependent on the oil transferred from the Strategic Strait of Hormuz (Saharkhiz, 2009: 4).

Over the decade, Saudi Arabia has been the most important oil supplier of China. The state supplied about one-fifth of the whole oil import of this country in 2012 by the import of 1.1 million barrels of crude oil per day. The officials of Arabia ensured China that the state can rely on Saudi Arabia to supply the required oil to continue economic growth. Saudis showed their intention in this field by participating in the China Fujian Province Refinery. 50% of the stock of the refinery about 240000 barrels made in Fujian belonged to China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec); 25% of the stock belonged to American Exxon Mobil Corporation and remained 25% belonged to Saudi Aramco, and the refinery is fed by Saudi crude oil.

Iran was the third supplier of China's oil in the majority of the past decade; although its position was mitigated in 2012, and became the fourth oil supplier for China. This was because of the pressures caused by sanctions of the United States to decrease Iran oil exports. The United States has granted permissions to some states to import Iran's oil in such a way that the states are not included in the sanctions. The United States extends the permissions every six months. However, the commitment of these states has been a reduction of oil exploitation from Iran during the extension period. Hence, the oil exploitation amount by China was decreased from 555 thousand barrels per day in 2011 to about 439 thousand barrels in 2012, and 402 thousand barrels per day in 2013. China National Oil Company has concluded several contracts to develop oil fields in Iran and Iraq. The contract for the development of Al-Ahdab, Halfaya, and Rumila fields in Iraq, and Azadegan and Yadavaran Fields in Iran are in this field. However, the China projects in Iraq have faster progress from Iran. The CNCP company of China is one of the companies with expanded influence in the oil industry of this state after the end of the war in Iraq. The project of Rumila Oil Field development, with the cooperation of CNCP and BP, is one of the most brilliant activities of China in the upstream part of the Oil industry in

the world. After a few years of deprivation of China from the presence of Iraq dictated by the US, the state began its activity in the economic scene (Namayeshi, 2007: 46).

China's activities have been limited over the years in the field of oil in Iran, and the inactivity of China in phase 11 of South Pars caused the abandonment of CNCP from the project. The company in Azadegan Field and the Sinopec Company in Yadavarn Field have a delay in enforcing their plans, and this is because of sanctions against Iran. It seems that China tends to keep Iranian projects until the issue of Nuclear Weapon is cleared. They want neither to lose the project nor to be involved in the risk of US sanctions.

International energy agency has predicted that the oil imports of the United States from the Middle East in the horizon of 2035 will be decreased to 100.000 barrels per day, and the whole import volume is decreased to 3% due to the increased domestic production and decreased demand for oil in America. Despite this, it is predicted that China oil imports from the Middle East reaches 6.5 million barrels in 2035, and form about 545% of whole oil imports. Decreased importance of the oil of the Persian Gulf for the United States may reduce the importance of security of the region for the country (Hassan Tash, 2013: 11). However, the region can be never unimportant and negligible for the United States. Using regional markets, international terrorism issues, and its relation to the region, and also prevention of using nonpeaceful nuclear weapons, along with controlling energy and oil flow, are other factors of the tendency of the United States to be present in this region. It could be found that the importance of the region and Hormoz Strait will be significantly increased for China. In this field, china needs to be in tight and good relations with Iran, and even to have a common effort with Iran to supply security of the region due to the military power of ran in Strategic Hormoz Strait.

On the other hand, it should be noted that China has various measures available for long-term energy supply. Some part of the measures for the cooperation of this state with Russia has been explained in the previous study. Some other part of China measures is focused on the investment of this state in the North American energy sector. Since 2009, more than 50% of foreign investments of China in the energy sector were possessed to buying stocks and possession of the assets of energy sector companies, especially the upstream sector of the oil industry in North America. China made investment more than 8 billion dollars in this sector of the United States only in 2010. The oil managers of China have also announced their readiness for more investments. Under such conditions and due to Iran's sanctions, the tendencies of China for investment in Iran and North America, especially the United States, conflict with each other.

Investment of some Chinese companies in Iran can prevent their investment in America. On the contrary, the investment of some other companies in the United States may restrict them to invest in Iran. However, China needs good relations with Iran in the long-term as was mentioned before this (Hassan Tash, 2013: 11).

Conclusion

As the Republic of China follows economic development policy with extraordinary speed, the need of this state for fossil fuels such as oil and gas would be increased. The main driving force of China for its activity in the Persian Gulf is energy requirements and mitigation of the role of its ideology in the world policy after the Cold war. Although China had ideologic look at regional issues during the Cold War, national interests and functionalism played a key role in the foreign policy of this state after Cold War. This role has affected the security balance of regional actors. Since the early 1990s, China lost its self-sufficiency on energy, and become dependent on oil imports. The strategic issues have affected the attitude of China toward the region, competition, and cooperation with America, and closeness to big energy actors in the region such as Saudi Arabia (as the ally of America) and Iran (as the opponent of America). Hence, the stability of the region has been increased for China for this reason. Now, China is progressing the reforms and open doors, and the international transactions of this state have been extended every day. Finally, the function of China in the evolutions of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf has added a new variable to the variables causing the events of the region. Inattentiveness to the variable in the near past was not an important shortcoming for the analysis of regional events. However, no exact analysis of evolutions of this region can be provided without considering China's Middle East role policy under the current situations.

References

- Camp J. (2004), Strategic Geography of the Middle East, Trans: Mohammad Mehdi Matin, Volume I, Tehran: Strategic Studies Publications, 1: 23-36 (in Persian).
- Ebrahimi N. (2011), "The Impact of Social Networks and Satellite Channels on the Occurrence and Development of the Arab Revolutions", Quarterly Journal of Strategic Studies, 8(2): 67-78 (in Persian).
- Hassan Tash G. (2013), China and Energy in the Persian Gulf, Tehran: Nou Andish Publications, 2: 11-25 (in Persian).
- Khorsandi J. (2013), International Impacts of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Tehran: Islamic Revolution Documentation Center, 2: 94-106 (in Persian).
- Kuangyi Y. (2017), "Development of Sino – Arab Relation and the Evolution of China's Middle East Policy the New Era", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 15(2): 14-29.
- Maleki A. (2013), Analysis of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Rahbord Quarterly, 2(5): 58-63 (in Persian).
- Morgenthau H. (1995), Politics among Nations, Trans. Homeira Moshirzadeh, Tehran: Publishing Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3: 197-206 (in Persian).
- Naeini M. (2019), The Concept and Dimensions of Soft Threat in Security Studies, Tehran: Saghi Publications, 2: 105-119(in Persian).
- Namayeshi A. (2007), "China's Economic and Trade Capacities in Iraq", Ravand Monthly, February 2(1): 46-59 (in Persian).
- Noruzi M. (2013), Arabic Spring - Islamic Awakening Book, Tehran: Tarhe Nou Publications, 1: 216-227 (in Persian).
- Pirsalami A. (2015), "China and Iran, Foreign Policy Strategies and the Challenge of Inclusive Cooperation" Quarterly Journal of Foreign Relations, 7(3): 92-101 (in Persian).
- Saharkhiz A. (2009), "Economic Relations between China and the Persian Gulf Countries", Quarterly Journal of Events and Analysis, 23(6): 4-10 (in Persian).
- Shabani R. (2018), Soft Power and Cultural Identity in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Soft Power Quarterly, 3(9): 80-94 (in Persian).
- Talebifar A. (2011), Strategic Relations between Iran and China, Tehran: Strategic Publications, 4: 132-140 (in Persian).