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The Environment, Geopolitics and Artificial Islands of Dubai in the Persian Gulf

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Abstract

In recent decades, environmental degradation and its consequences as well as the importance of its safeguarding have resulted in the emergence of many researches in different scientific fields. However, the environmental geopolitics, as O Tuathail states, deals with the relationship between the earth and human in geopolitical tradition. Accordingly, in this paper, by adopting critical geopolitics perspective and through descriptive-analytical method, the environmental geopolitics in the Persian Gulf is studied. In this regard, the artificial islands of Dubai are considered the study cases. The facts suggest that these islands which are created as the result of developmental policies of Dubai, have threatened the environmental security of Persian Gulf and have caused alarming environmental consequences for other coastal states.

Keywords: Environmental Geopolitics, Persian Gulf, Artificial Islands;

1. Introduction

Simon Dalby, the geographer who has carried out many researches on the subject of environmental security, believes that we live in anthropogenic era, an era in which the political and subjective decisions entail objective and universal implications. Therefore, we determine our destiny and the future of biosphere. According to him, this issue is the key of geopolitics in the decades ahead (Dalby, 2010). The issue that who causes such problems or relieves them and that who decides what should be done and by whom, indicates that in macro scale, this topic is the focus of geopolitics (O Tuathail, Dalby, & Routledge, 2003, 180).Therefore, the critical view in geography, in the areas where the earth and politics are interwoven (Hommel & Murphy, 2012), criticizes this modern idea that the nature is an external entity which can be ignored by means of technology (Dalby, 2007).

2. Environmental geopolitics

According to Dalby, geopolitics is the political understanding of the world in a planetary scale (Dalby, 2010). In recent decades, the "environmental geopolitics" discourse has turned into a new discourse in geopolitics studies. O'Tuathail calls the researchers who study the relationship between human and the earth in the geopolitical

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tradition, as the "environmental geopoliticians". Many of the actions that have led to global environmental degradation and pollution as well as the strategies to deal with them reflect the interests of power structures which are deeply involved in creation and continuity of environmental problems (O Tuathail, Dalby, & Routledge, 2003, 7).

2.1. The Persian Gulf

The Persian Gulf is a semi-enclosed sea and is one of the world's oldest waterways located in the Middle East (Nadim et al. 2008). Mojtahedzadeh believes that the Persian Gulf embraces the nations who although culturally have profound differences, through common political, strategic and economic preoccupations, present a unique model of a geopolitical region that is fundamentally a heterogeneous environment (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2003, 9).

On the other hand, the Persian Gulf is the world's most polluted body of water. Discharge of oil stains and industrial wastes have increased the fluctuations of temperature as well as salinity. The facts indicate that, in addition to such complications, particularly the marine ecosystems of western part of Persian Gulf such as coral reefs are severely disturbed and are being degraded (Sadiq & Charles, 1993, 8-9).

2.1.1. Artificial is lands and the law of the sea

The Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), has given the coastal states the rights to establish and exploit artificial islands in the exclusive economic zone (UNCLOSE, 1892, Article 60, 41). However, in an earlier article, it is emphasized that "the coastal state shall have due regard to the rights of other states and shall act in a manner compatible with the provisions of this Convention" (Ibid, Article 56, 40). Either individually or collectively, the governments should, implement all actions under this Convention to prevent, reduce and control marine environment pollution arising from any source which is the origin of such pollution. The governments should endeavor to put their policies in the path of ensuring that their legitimate operations do not damage their own as well as other country's environment. They also should ensure that their operations do not lead to depletion of marine habitats as well as threatening or putting the marine species in danger of extinction (Ibid, article 194, 98).

Besides, this Convention highlights that when the state is informed of the issues that endanger the marine environment or will cause imminent damage, should immediately inform other countries and relevant international organizations (Ibid, article 198, 100). According to this approach, although the Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), has given coastal states the rights to construct artificial islands, it has strictly limited such operations to the protection of marine environment as well as the rights of other coastal states.

2.1.1.1. United Arab Emirates, economic development, and artificial islands

In recent decades, in order to reduce its dependence on oil revenues, Dubai has started to develop tourism industry. According to Salahuddin's research, only 10 percent of Dubai's GDP in 2000 has been from oil revenues. During these years, by putting emphasis on tourism sector, Dubai has obtained the highest number of hotels in the world, in such a way that in 2006 the income of this sector has reached 22 percent of GDP. However, in early 1990, all Dubai coasts were occupied by hotels and Dubai needed to create more coasts in order to develop tourism sector. In line with this policy, the construction of artificial islands in the Persian Gulf started (Salahuddin, 2006, 6-7).The construction of these islands has resulted in devastating environmental consequences in this semi-enclosed sea. Dredging of sand that has led to confusion and turbidity of seawater as well as damaging marine habitats such as coral reefs and shells covered by sand are among the consequences of making these islands. Naturally and economically, coral reefs have high values which are degraded as the result of increase in temperature and salinity.

Also, construction of islands has led to changes in the marine natural flows of Persian Gulf which remove the pollution (Butler, 2005).

3. Conclusion

In recent decades, using the influence of technology, the power structures have ignored the nature for the sake of protecting their interests in such a way that they have caused environmental degradation as well as the emergence of new security concerns. Meanwhile, in order to reduce oil dependence, Dubai has started development of tourism industry and subsequently the construction of artificial islands in the Persian Gulf. This semi-enclosed sea with a fragile ecosystem and special climatic conditions, has suffered great environmental pressures including an increase in temperature and salinity, degradation of marine species and disruption in the natural flow of water. Although the Convention on the Law of the Sea gives Dubai the rights to construct these islands, environmental degradation caused by such constructions and ignoring the rights of other countries are contrary to the provisions of this Convention. In order to maintain environmental security, policymakers need to understand that we live in an era in which the security issues have turned into environmental security and given that the environment is an integrated concept, the interests and threats of all countries are interwoven.

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