

Examining Political Relationship between Iran & Afghanistan by Focus on Sistan

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the political relationship between Iran and Afghanistan by focusing on Sistan by using descriptive-analytical method that intends to find answer to this question that, what is the influence as a result of relationship between these 2 countries on Sistan area and status of Hirmand River water? Separation of Afghanistan from Iran is regarded as formation of new political borders and establishing new political relationship under influence of new geographical variables including: Sistan and Hirmand River. Although Iran and Afghanistan have common political border, common culture, religion have the highest potential for developing political, security, economic and cultural cooperation; in spite of this broad common points there are still several problems and impediments for developing relationship. This thesis in addition to examining status of Sistan also studies the relationship between both countries during recent years. There are some recommendations for improving relationship between Iran and Afghanistan in relation to Sistan including: dependency of Afghanistan through Oman Sea, having access to free waters and promoting economic, social and culture cooperation for benefiting from water rights of Hirmand

Keywords: Examining ; Political Relationship ; Iran & Afghanistan ; Focus ; Sistan

1) Introduction:

The relationship of Iran and Afghanistan was always accompanied with many ups and downs. Upon the victory of Islamic Revolution the strategic status of Afghanistan as neighbor of Iran and Middle Asia was revealed. Upon leaving Soviet Union forces from Afghanistan, diplomatic activities of Islamic Republic of Iran for political and security stability of this country was increased and Islamic Republic of Iran upon collapse of Taliban Terrorist Group played key role on establishing national government and transferring government. Both countries in spite of having common political border and benefiting from common religion and culture, it was expected to promote their political, security, economic and cultural cooperation. However, in spite of broad common points, there were many problems and impediments for promoting their mutual relationship. Presence of more than 2 million Afghan immigrants in Iran and chaos and insecurity at eastern borders of Iran from one hand and concerns of Afghan authorities in relation to intervention of Iran at unrests at south and west of Afghanistan as a country that has the most indices of human development due to war led to rising many concerns for neighbor countries specially Iran. Anyway, unsuitable condition of Hirmand River water that rate of its quality and treatment effect is still unknown that is controlled by Afghanistan government, caused to prevent from having any certain support for future of Sistan that its life and survival depends on this river and also it was impossible to perform any agriculture or construction project by using water of

this river. In addition according to mutual relationship between both countries and whereas government of Iran proved its good intention during war of Afghanistan and residing more than 4 million Afghan immigrants in Iran, this issue shows one of the most important problems of Iran at economic, social, cultural and political affairs; nevertheless, Afghan people showed their original intention in the problem of Hirmand River.

1-1) Statement of Problem:

Important history of Afghanistan is clear for everyone; since, these small parts create history and part of this history is related to the present day's Sistan and Afghanistan that used to have common tribe, racial and political relationship. Although today they are separated, Afghanistan since many years ago was regarded as property and land of Iran. During Safavid age due to dominating Shiite tradition in Iran, the southern and western parts of present day's Afghanistan attitude toward Sunni religion. During this age the tribes of this area as a result of attack to Isfahan occupied this city and called as capital of Safavid dynasty. Reducing relationship of Iran with newly established country of Afghanistan was only due to key role of England and Russia. In the year 1836 the claim of Iran against Herat was opposed by Great Britain; since, Great Britain believed that such demand may weak the potentials of Afghanistan and finally according to Paris Treaty, Iran officially rejected ownership of its lands in Afghanistan. Separation of Afghanistan from Iran was regarded as establishing a new political border and creating new political relationship under influence of new geographical variables including: Sistan and Hirmand River. The Sistan area is located at south west of Afghanistan; in which, this area consists of important agricultural water of Hirmand River that passes from Hirmand and many strategies of England is important for Sistan was important non-influential zone; since this area is located between Iran, Afghanistan and India. The present thesis intends to study the effect of political relationship of Iran and Afghanistan on Sistan area.

1-2) Importance and Necessity of Research:

Adjacency of Sistan with newly established Afghanistan that life of Sistan depends on Hirmand River that is controlled by Afghans and whereas Sistan is located at east of Iran which is regarded as geopolitical and strategic zone, it is required for performing more research on this area. Until now there is no comprehensive research about relationship of Iran and Afghanistan by focusing on Sistan; therefore, we intended to carry out research about this topic and vital importance of Sistan area

1-3) Research Question:

1) What is influence of political relationship of Iran and Afghnistan on Sistan area?

1-4) Research Hypothesis:

The political relationship of Iran and Afghanistan during each age had separated influence on Sistan area

1-5) Research Domain:

Iran and Afghanistan in Sistan border

1-6) Introducing Area of This Study:

Sistan:

Sistan is located at north of Sistan and Balouchestan. This province at east section has 900km common border with Pakistan and 300km common border with Afghanistan. In southern section it has 270km water border with Oman Sea and from north section, north west has 190km common border with Khorasan and from west section it has 580km common border with Kerman and 165km common border with Hormozgan province. The Sistan and Balouchestan province is regarded as the largest area province of Iran that is ranked as the second largest province after Khorasan province. This province is consisted of 2 areas including: Sistan and Balouchestan that have completely different nature. The Sistan section is located at 8117km north part of this province that is flat and blocked basin consisted of old delta alluvium and present Hirmand River (Iran Statistics Center 2006).

2) Literature Review:

2-1) Already Fulfilled Researches:

1) The book called *The Burnt Land* written by Reza Raeisi Tousi deals with competition between England and Russia and also writer of this book refers to policies of England for separating and dividing Sistan for creating middle area for maintaining India while competition with Russia. Author of this book also refers to policies of England for stimulating Afghans for exploiting Sistan and the reason that government successfully established government of Gold Smith and Mac Mahon in order to be present in Sistan and separating parts of this area. The issue that adds to the importance of this book is the attempt of author for describing influence of establishing such governments on Sistan. Author states that ruling England for dividing water of Hirmand River as in favor of Afghans caused many problems for Sistan that emergently required vital water of Hirmand River. Then it deals with influence of reducing water of Sistan and agriculture and animal husbandry of Sistan while elementary division and late 1907's that led to deprivation of water is compared. Finally, writer refers to problem of Hirmand River and mutual relationship of both countries during First Pahlavi Age and activities of Reza Shah for solving problem of Hirmand River water.

2) In another research the deals with evolutions at eastern border, is the book of *Iran and Afghanistan* written by Yusef Motevali Haghghi that studies and analyzes political and military events at east and role of foreign powers in Iran since Ahmad Shah Darani until Ahmad Shah Ghajar. The final chapter of this book deals with studying the problem of Sistan

3) The book of "Semi-Day Geography" that is report of Gholfaghar Kermani as high rank representative of Iran that was dispatched to Sistan in the year 1870 refers to simultaneous presence of Gold Smith government in Sistan and studying status of agriculture and animal husbandry and surveying Sistan that assisted to the dispatched board from Iran. This book also

refers to activity of government of Iran since division of Sistan and joining great part of it to Afghans

4) An article with title of “status of Hirmand Water in political relationship of Iran and Afghanistan during Reza Shah written by Daryoush Rahmanian and Fazollah Baraghi described struggles of Sarhad tribe in Sistan and Afghans on Hirmand River water. On this basis the central government attempted to solve this problem through concluding several contracts

5) The book called “hydro-politic Hirmand and its influence on political relationships of Iran and Afghanistan written by Mohammad Reza Hafeznia and et al refers to high importance role of Hirmand River for people of Sistan

6) Historical geography of Sistan written by Christian and et al deals with different geographical and historical aspects of this area

7) A thesis with title of “political relationship of Afghan rulers with rulers of Sistan by focusing on evolutions of Sistan since 1941” studies political relationship of Afghan rulers and rulers of Sistan by descriptive-analytical method through focusing on different presence of England at this area. Through establishing new government in Afghanistan and political link with Kiani dynasty, the Sistan was controlled by Derani government and continued with military and governmental cooperation. Such cooperation prepares suitable opportunities for dividing Sistan among head of tribes and turned the claim of Sistan until presence of England in Sistan as one of the most complicated problems of 19th century.

8) The thesis for studying geopolitical relationship of Iran and Afghanistan during second decade of Islamic Revolution, that deals with studying geopolitical influences on relationship of Iran and Afghanistan also political and economic relationship between Iran and Afghanistan, identifying dry land border between Iran and Afghanistan

9) The third chapter of book deals with foreign policies of Islamic Republic of Iran with neighbor governments written by Mohammad Jafar Javadi Arjomandi, the foreign policies of Islamic Republic of Iran with Afghanistan and also political, economic, cultural and business relationship of both countries, presence of U.S.A in Afghanistan and its influence on Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979 until 2011.

Hirmand the Heart of Sistan:

Hirmand River is the only river of Sistan that is located between India and Tigris River. The ancient name of Hirmand was Atomander. This river originates from valleys of Baba Yaghma mountain in Afghanistan and upon passing 1200km enters into land of Sistan. The final section of Hirmand River is established between border of Afghanistan and Iran and is poured into Hamoun lake. The additional water of Hamoun lake is poured into Godarzeh lake in border of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Mojtahedzadeh 1999, 78). It seems that Hamoun river was larger during medieval time and has 3 branches that are poured into this lake including: Khavas River (Khoash), Fareh River and Esfaraz River (Sabzevar Herat) that is today called as Haroud River. The ancient name of this river among old authors was Ariapolis (Ahmadi 2008, 113). The Sistan plain is located at estuary of Hirmand River by having fertile land that is due to billion square

meters of alluvium that was carried during million years by Hirmand from surrounds of Kabul until end of Zabol plain for sedimenting large amount of water. In fact, flow of Hirmand and fertile soil created and maintained life to Sistan, urban and rural residences during history (Ebrahimzadeh 2010, 59).

1) Location of Sistan:

Sistan is an area located at south east of Iran plateau that with respect to geography is regarded as plateau of Iran; however, from political point of view the large section of Sistan is located in land of Afghanistan and Iran and small part of it is located in Pakistan (Ziya Tavana 1992). Sistan has area of 169471km at geographical coordinate system of 30 degree and 7minutes at north width and 58 minutes to 61 degree and 50 minutes of east length. According to the recent political division this area consisted of 3 small cities, 5 districts and 17 counties, its capital is Zabol and from west, north is limited toward Khorasan province and from east, north and north east is limited to Afghanistan. Altitude of this city is 498.2meters from surface of sea and is located at large plain within surrounds of flat land (Iran Statistics Center, Census of Housing and Inhabitants 2006). During several thousand years history of Sistan, the geographical location was changed due to economic and social evolutions. During third millennium B.C. the burnt city was instance of civility and developed property of Sistan. This area has a crossroad status and is located at east and west civilizations and in fact connects the civilizations of India to Mesopotamia which has developed civilization.

Sistan plain is a flat land that is limited to Malek Siah mountain from south and to Palangan range of mountains from west. In addition from north and east, this plain is continue alongside of Afghanistan land and is ended to Hendokesh Mountains. This plain has very mild slope that is located at north west of Hamoun River; nevertheless, ratio of slope at south east, north east and south west into Sistan is higher and it is reduced from its level (Faryak consultant engineers, 1984, 811).

History of residence and civil life in Sistan land has close relationship with geographical and climate properties specially vital Hirmand River flow; since, Hirmand River is continuously flowing at this plain and plays key role on formation, growth and development of urbanism, villages during thousand years history of this land. Sistan during its life was adjacent to areas of central Asia, Khorasan, India and China and in some parts of history has unique growth. This land is regarded as Connection Bridge of western Asia, India and China it is pass way for trading caravans and campaign of some great marshals and famous people who created history (Ebrahimzadeh 2010, 49).

2) Reasons of Importance of Iran for Afghanistan

- * Iran is the best path for access of Afghanistan to free waters
- * Iran is the best path for transit of narcotics to Europe
- * Emergent requirement to oil and gas of Iran
- * Iran is gateway of entering Afghanistan into Europe

3) Reasons of Importance of Afghanistan for Iran

- * Strong influence of domestic security of Iran from Afghanistan
- * Afghanistan is the best route for access of Iran to Tajikistan
- * Presence of radical Islam following groups and anti-Iranian groups (opposition) controlled by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in Afghanistan
- * Strong requirement of Afghanistan to waters of Iran especially in relation to Sistan

4) Solutions for Hirmand and Hamoun River Water:

Anyway, the uncertain status of Hirmand River water that its rate of quality and treatment is unknown and it is controlled by Afghanistan government, caused to prevent from support for future of Sistan that its life depends on Hirmand River water. In addition, no agriculture and construction project may be executed on this area and whereas relationship between Iran and Afghanistan and whereas Iran proved its good intention to people of Afghanistan during war of Afghanistan and more than 4million Afghan immigrants are residing in Iran, this issue caused one of the most economic, social, cultural and political problems for Iran. However, Afghans in the problem of Hirmand River water showed their real intention; meanwhile, there are some solutions for this problem including:

i) After a short review on past history of Sistan with Afghans they have common history, culture and destiny. Meanwhile, the game of alien governments led to increasing pessimisms, so that after fundamental changes in principles and goals of old exploitation, these disagreements that have root in wicked exploitation still remain in mutual relationship of both countries which had negative influence on Sistan. It seems that we have neglected the concept of prevention and intend to find a treatment. This is reality about relationship of Sistan and Afghans that was revealed during Qajar dynasty and at the present time the Hirmand River is involved and on the other hand during recent age maintaining population of Sistan for eastern borders is very important; since, security issues is changed upon presence of U.S.A and fundamentalism ideology movements in Afghanistan and also special ideology of Pakistan that are all collected in Sistan. The requirements of active diplomacy were concluding some treaties by and between political-security authorities of Iran and Afghan. In case demanding for revision at previous tries and concluding new agreements for observing natural and regional realities of both governments, firstly, it should be in favor of national benefits and secondly, it should meet the requirements of people of Sistan. The government of Afghanistan should know that at globalization and mutual dependency age, the benefit of countries are very close and correlated together and having mutual cooperation may increase stability of western borders.

ii) Preventing from political game for the problem of Hirmand water in Afghanistan and dividing Hirmand water among land of Sistan and meeting annual requirements of water, constructing regular and logical canals for stability of dividing equal agricultural water and prevention from misuse of water or wasting water at alongside of Hamoun and Shileh River

iii) Common plan for investment on reservoir dam and controlling appropriate places at lower sections for joining different braches of Arghand water

iv) Nation of Iran and Afghanistan are fully aware with this reality that Hirmand River upon receiving Arghand water and Kamal Khan treaty, none of the parties have exclusive rights and Sistan, Iran and Afghanistan have equal rights for irrigation and water requirements

v) Whereas Afghanistan does not have access to free water, the Oman Sea is very importance for creating complete dependency of Afghanistan; since, in case of creating such dependency it leads to revival and obtaining to water right of Hirmand River

vi) Fundamental negotiations should begin between Iran and Afghanistan in relation fair division of Hirmand water and to convince government of Afghanistan that in compliance with international river rules and regulations to observe water share of Iran from Hirmad River and

also to establish supervisor organization for good execution of this contract. Finally we hope that Iran may benefit from all of its abilities and facilities for receiving water right that is legally belongs to people of Iran.

Conclusion:

Whereas Sistan from ecological point of view is located at arid land, in case of rising drought the related damages and its influence on lifestyle of people living around Hirmand river is greatly increased and consequently drying pond either directly and indirectly leads to stop flowing water and drought of this river. Pond and aquaculture birds are regarded as global heritage that should be remained through friendly and effective cooperation between governments all through the world. Flow of Hirmand River (Sistan) is only water supplier of Sistan and whereas importance of water at the present ages some of the arid land borders have lost their importance due to border disagreements. River borders due to importance of water and related tensions for countries having Border River have considerable importance. River borders are regarded as natural borders or several political units due to the their changing, unchanging and instability nature have significant effect on border disagreements of Iran and Afghanistan. Hirmand River is located at border of Iran and Afghanistan due to different interpretations such as: exact place of border since the time of formation was influenced by border disagreement of both countries.

Whereas formation of this river border was according to meeting the exploitation benefits of Great Britain; since, during Qajar government the England exploitation government due to weakness of government of Iran and in order to attract the attention of government of Afghanistan (due to adjacent to India) concluded some border contracts based its exploitation policies, separated some parts of land of Iran and joined them to Afghanistan. According to this exploitation contract, part of border of both countries was located on most instable part of Hirmand river on alluvium plain of Sistan that is faced with permanent changes and follows from river flow pattern. Consequently, water of Hirmand River was divided between large Sistan (Iran) and small Sistan (Afghanistan) through establishing Gold Smith and Mac Mahon government. Upon intervention of England government sometimes from total share of Hirmand river water only one third share of water was allocated to Iran and other two third was allocated by Afghanistan which led to periodical drought from 1970-1971 and 2001-2002 in Sistan.

From natural geographical-political point of view one of the most effective factors on rising border disagreements of border river is due to morphologic conditions of river and changing several routes during short term, so that these properties including: small grain alluvium at river bed, wide river and alongside impediments at middle river bed created complicated and several problems at legal system of Iran which influenced political relationship of both countries. In spite of historical disputes of Iran and Afghanistan on determining Hirmand border, instability at riverbed had significant role. Results showed that the most important consequence of influence on morphologic properties of Hirmand river on border disagreement are including: disagreement on determining exact place of border on riverbed, disagreement due to instability of distributing water right between both countries and disagreement of determining domain of border line of both countries. Iran and Afghanistan due to common geographical, historical, economic and cultural issues influence on each other. The strategic environment of Iran is so that Afghanistan is turned into one of the most important loops of this environment. Nowadays absence of security and peace in Afghanistan, presence of occupying policy of U.S.A and hidden policy of some countries in order to transfer narcotics, weapon smuggling gangs and terrorist groups are among important cases that endangers stability and security of this region.

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