Factors concerning the phenomenon of pan-Arabism in Iran

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Abstract:

The study of abstract and objective factors in the emergence of pan-Arabism in Iran, in pre and post-revolutionary eras is the subject of this essay. The goal is to examine and study elements that provoked ethnic sentiments in southern and Arab-dominated parts of Iran. At a juncture in history, such desires and sentiments manifested themselves in terms of separatist movements. This essay is based on the hypothesis that a sequence of domestic factors such as political, social, cultural and economic factors on the one hand and foreign interference on the other hand have been the cause of instigation which led up to pan-Arabic sentiments and orientations. During the course of this study, it was concluded that domestic factors have played a major role in such inclinations. Such factors can be a breeding ground for a serious national crisis. Given the fact that preservation of national unity and territorial integrity of the country is the primary objective and safeguarding national pride and history of Iran is of paramount importance, all efforts must be invested in gaining knowledge about and diminishing such separatist inclinations.

Introduction

Pan-Arabism was first brought up in the First World War. The downfall of Ottoman Empire and establishment of Arab countries that had been parts of Ottoman Empire in the past was the first incentive of creating pan-Arabism in the face of ottoman pan-Turkism.the formation of Arab league in 1945 was an effort to reinforce this tendency. At that time, liberal pan-Arabism came into being and the issue of Palestinians and Israelis gave rise to extreme pan-Arabism. Former president of Egypt, Jamal Abdel Nasser did a lot in promoting the idea of pan Arabism. After his death in 1970 and assuming office by President Sadat, the confrontational stance

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against Israel turned into a diplomatic one. After a while, Saddam Hosein became the front man in promoting pan-Arabism and did his utmost to bring this ideology from Egypt to Iraq. We will be elaborating on the consequences of that in this essay later on. Alteration the name of Persian Gulf and claim of ownership on three islands of our country has been the dishonest measures taken in this regard.

In addition to the regional significance, from the nationalistic point of view, many believe that the formation of modern governments concurrent with the beginning of Pahlavi era and strengthening the idea of pan-Iranism and extreme nationalism and lack of attention to ethnic varieties had an impact on politicization of different ethnicities in the country. The nationalist notion that Reza shah pursued had roots in pan-Iranism and it led to crackdown and repression of different ethnic groups. Subsequently, chieftains and children of heads of tribes along with non-tribal elite backed by regional and international support engaged in disarray and revolt in the country. For example, they were inclined towards socialist and pan-Arabic causes. Therefore, from a different standpoint, pan-Arabism has been the outcome of efforts, made by colonial countries to create rift and divisions among middle-eastern countries. In this study, we refer to modern government, elite and forces (international regimes) as abstract factors.

We also refer to partial sense of alienation and disenfranchisement with respect to political, social, cultural and above all, economic issues as objective factors. Because what has the potential of turning into a political ethnic supremacy in Iran is the partial sense of disenfranchisement.

Ebn Khaldun can be considered one of the pioneers in theorization about ethnicities. In his view, the formation of ethnic groups is quite normal and expectable. Ethnic honour and the sense of kindness and compassion that god has created in the hearts of human being towards their relatives and acquaintances and the sense of pride and togetherness are the reasons of forming an ethnic group.ebn Khaldun believes that the formation of state begins by the formation of ethnicities. He considers social consistency key for an ethnic group that wants to bring about regime change.

One of the other theorists is max Weber. In his mind, ethnic group is an annoying term because it is full of emotions. We call human groups, ethnic groups who believe in their common race and this is the result of physical and traditional similarities or maybe recollections about colonialism and immigration amongst these people, he says.

Weber indicates that ethnic groups believe that they are of the same ancestors.

Ethnic studies have increased quantitatively and qualitatively in the world. That is because of the establishment of research centers and ethnic study departments across the globe. Furthermore, political interests within and without the countries have made them more attentive towards the question of ethnicities. In recent years, in scientific and executive institutions, studies on the subject of Iranian ethnicities have grown dramatically.

The phenomenon of pan-Arabism has been the subject of controversy and conflict among sociopolitical thinkers and correspondingly, great deal of research and study has been carried out. What makes such studies of paramount importance is the fact that many of our compatriots are Arabs who live

in Khuzestan, Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces located in southern part of Iran. They made efforts to stage chaos, highlighting ethnic supremacy or even gaining autonomy against the central government in the past.

Since the question of ethnicities and ethnic supremacy are self-evident and in case of radicalization can lead to sense of extreme supremacy over other ethnic groups and pose a danger to the solidarity and unity of the society, further examinations of pan-Arabism and inclinations towards Arab ethnicities are imperative.

Assumption: beyond any doubt, Iranians do not have any positive approach towards Russians, brats and particularly Arabs in terms of mentality and character. Such an approach has a deep root in transactions and dealing of Iranians in the past with these nations. Arabs played a major role In Iranian characterization and identification. Despite that, Iranians have always tried to preserve their Persian character and identity by cognitive consolidation and even making a distinction in accepting the religion of Islam by being a Shiite nation. (Kaviani, 2009: 5)

The question, which will be answered in this writing, is that what gave rise to the creation of pan-Arabism in Iran? In addition, the assumptions are as follows: a sequence of abstract and objective factors have had an impact in creating pan-Arabism. Moreover, pan-Arabism is the dependent and abstract and objective factors are independent variables here.

Definition of variables:

A: Arab ethnic supremacy or pan-Arabism: strong sense of belonging one can have toward his or her ethnic group and perceiving it as superior to others is ethnic supremacy. This is something that can cause conflict and confrontation in the society. (Mclean, 1996: 163)

Ethnic supremacy is a kind of particularism. Particularism is the belief that a particular group has the privilege over a much larger group or community. in contrast, holism is about the allegiance of one person to a political or social group not to a particular and insignificant group. If we refer to particularism in the case of traditional society, what it would mean is tribal, racial, familial and ethnic superiority. (Saee, 1996: 143).here the definition of ethnicity is in the opposite of the concept of nation and according to Abolhamd, nation is separate from the people in terms of concept. The people from whatever ethnicity they might be can relate to one another in terms of material and spiritual bonds. (Abolhamd, 1990: 111)

Pan-Arabism, in general, signifies an extreme tendency that advocates Arabic culture, religion, language, race and integrity and contains specific conceptual indicators vis-a-vis Iran. Goldziher, German orientalism says: Pan-Arabism tried to form a new identity in Iran 1400 years ago. It affected the Iranian culture and was affected from Iranians in all aspects. (Goldziher, 1992)

Prior to the Islamic revolution, in the name of pan-Arabism, Iran suffered separatist activities. These experiences such as separation of Bahrain influenced our foreign policy at the international level. Such as that of Jamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, that deteriorated multilateral ties between Iran and Arab nations and GCC countries partly due to good relation that Iran used to have with Israel.

After the Islamic revolution, in the name of pan-Arabism, Iran was invaded by Iraq (8 years of imposed war against us and explicit announcement of the annexation of Khuzestan and khorramshahr to Iraq). In addition, interference in our internal affairs and policies. (Including 2011 conference in Egypt concerning the autonomy in Khuzestan),

(Tabnak website, 2012)

B: Abstract factors of pan-Arabism in Iran:

    Modern central government

    Tribal and non-tribal elite

    International forces

    Tribal convergence in the Persian Gulf region

C: Objective factors of pan-Arabism in Iran:

    Partial sense of depravation in political, sociocultural and economic dimensions in Arab-dominated places of Iran.

Importance of the issue: This issue, if not tackled, has the potential of turning into a national crisis for the country. Moreover, given the fact that our country has been the victim of 8 years of war and ideologies such as pan-Arabism and separatist aspirations, these issues ought to be dealt with at the high-stakes national security level. Muhammad Mahdi Aljavaher, prominent Iraqi poet in his book named Zakaria; refer to a war between pan Arabic forces and shittes. We remember 8 years of war, imposed by Saddam Hosein against Islamic republic of Iran, which was merged with religious and racial incentives. (ww.taghrib.org)

Background:

Entry of Arabs in Iran set the basis of pan-Arabic discourse in Iran. Although Arab Muslim was able to challenge the glory of Persian Empire, they were influenced by Persian culture as well. One of the influences was the way Persians ruled against the subordinates. The reaction of Persians against Arab ruling was demonstrated in a cause called Shaobiyeh. Shaobiyeh cause, enjoyed intellectual and cultural support among the public. This cause favored cultural, political and military actions to preserve the country and to rid it from the occupation. In the area of cul-

ture, composition of Shahnameh by Ferdowsi metaphorically is like an impeccable entity in Persian culture and literature. In the area of politics, in Barmakiyan era, a number of outstanding political figures existed. In addition, Umar, the first caliph of Islamic Caliphate, appointed a Persian as his minister.

We can also refer to Salman al-Farsi whom the prophet Muhammad regarded as one of his own progeny. His role is highly praised in the battle of the trench. Persians at that time also took some military actions. For example, figures like Abu Muslim Khorasani and Barmaki are among those who acted military. (Eftekharzadeh, 1989: 76)

According to a different source, concerning the confrontation between Arabs and Persians, there is a narrative that is as follows: Sassanian Empire after the demise of Anooshirvan (Khosrow) deteriorated and was on decline, and collapsed after the invasion of Arabs in the middle of seventh century. This was the end to one era of Persian history and the beginning of a new one. In the new era, Iranian did infect convert to Islam but never is affected and manipulated by Arab customs and culture. For instance at the outset, Umayyad caliphate had a cultural influence on Byzantine Empire. However, after the transfer of capital from Damascus in Levant to Iraq, the Persian culture had the prevailing influence. According to professor levy, when the trophies and wealth, made Islamic caliphate affluent, Umar asked a Persian to manage and organize everything. What happened as a result was the establishment of governmental organization called the organization of management of public wealth and income. Umar claimed to learn justice and equity from Khosrow.

Abstract factors in consolidation of entity

and politicization of ethnicity:

Modern central government:

Modern central government means the formation of a western-oriented government, extreme attention toward the notion of Persian nationalism, secularism and dereligionization, change in the tribal lifestyle of Persians etc, something that transpired inadvertently, and led to radicalized pan-Arabism.

Relations between pre-Pahlavi ethnic groups and government: In most historical points of Iran, the government, by providing tribal and ethnic groups with the necessary resources and possibilities, and garnering taxes and granting responsibilities, formation of army and legislation of local laws, played a pivotal role in leading those ethnicities. (Ahmadi, 1998: 69-70,) In 1920, when Reza shah assumed power, he created sense of patriotism by centralizing the government, development of industry, westernization and dereligionization, this course of action was different from that of preceding governments such as Safavid, Qajar and Zand dynasties. (Smith, 1998: 88)

The role of the government in controlling ethnic groups and creation of confederations: The formation of ethnic groups was the outcome of relations of powers and pragmatic strategies not based on familial bonds. While the majority of Persian governments were composed of ethnic groups, governments themselves started forming new ethnic groups like ill khamsew confederation.ill khamsew was formed out of five smaller groups such as baseris, one small Arab group, Inanloo, Nafar and Baharloo which were mostly Turkish speakers. (Ahmadi, 1999: 59)

Elite:

The role of elite in the creation of policies and platforms of central government is con-

sidered the second abstract factor:

Elite comprising western-educated chieftains and head of ethnic groups after the experience of centralization of the government, tried to bring about some consistency in the tribal and ethnic groups. They organized leftist paramilitary groups and had active role in such activities. The second group was non-tribal non-ethnic elite who tried to be of assistance by sending their volunteers to insurgent Kurd, Turkmens, Arabs and Baluchis. (Human, 1999: 238,239)

Activities of elite:

Efforts of autonomy: A number of non-Persian speaking parts of iran including Turkmen Sahara, Khuzestan, have been the main base of many leftist communist groups such as Peykar and mujahedin Khalgh. Leaders of these groups were Persians who turned against the central government and staged demonstrations and anarchism in the country.

Influence of Britain among religious groups:

There used to be Sunnis limited to tribal groups like Kurd, Turkmens, Arabs and Baluchis who were living in backward places. In addition, Baluchis and Arabs have always enjoyed British support against the central government throughout the history. (Abrahamyan, 2013: 475)

International forces: Many of theorists who founded pan-Turkism, pan-Iranism and pan-Arabism have been attached with exploitative activities of Great Britain, France and Germany and that is the third abstract factor. (Mirmohammadi, 2003: 122)

International politics, at regional and transregional levels, playes a conclusive role in creating political institutions and persuasion of ethnic elite in this regard. (Ahmadi, 2003: 122) International involvement and

intervention in ethnic issues had a major role in the creation of separatist nationalist moves of minorities in the Middle East. Strategic and economic attractions have been the cause of many interventions in the Middle East. Britain backed ethnic groups in southeastern part of Iran in order to protect oil pipelines. After the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908, it supported Arab and Bakhtiari groups. Prior to the ww2, particularly in Qajar period, foreign forces had been using ethnic groups to the extent that it was difficult to find an ethnic group that was not enjoying some sort of a foreign umbrella. The policy of supporting ethnicities was pursued specifically by Germany and U.K. (Ahmadi, 1999: 175-178)

During the Pahlavi dynasty, the emergence of a modern centralized government posed a challenge to ethnic groups and destroyed their sociopolitical power. In response, many turned their attention to ancient languages and culture of Iran. International forces in all aspects encouraged and supported nationalistic moves induced by ethnicities.

After the Islamic revolution, policy of so-called large Middle East was adopted. Concepts like human rights and the rights of minorities, civil society, democracy, independent media, cultural diversity,…have been part of the agenda, advanced by U.S. to implement the policy of so-called large middle east.(Haghgoo, 2013: 199). Based on this agenda, people can only free themselves with the help of the United States. Sunni minority of Iran must get rid of the reign of Shia majority. Therefore, if ethnicities become populations who are on equal footing in terms of religion and language, they will no longer be considered a threat to the United States. Implementation of the federalism that separated Shia and Sunni communities and Kurds is

indicative of that effort.

Arabic national movements in 1984 founded a community of literature in Beirut, which was backed by US in 20th century, both superpowers strengthened that idea. Self-determinations of minority groups, which was first proposed by Wilson after the ww1 is one of the agenda that the west is pursuing. Although self-determination and autonomy coupled with sense of nationalism were first followed in 18 and 19th centuries.

Most of the heads of ethnic groups and educated elite of minority groups were inspired by that idea and followed the policy of autonomy later on. So the footprint of foreign superpowers and international intellectuals in the emergence of Arabic nationalism in the Persian Gulf region can be traced vividly.

On the other hand, in the Persian Gulf region, disparities in culture and language are a historical fact. In recent years, such differences widened. The new policy of the United States is dictating the situation where all countries in the region must be at loggerhead with one another so that the interest of western countries is preserved. Which country is supposed to be the next victim of u.s interest after Iraq? The animosity between Arabs and Persians in such a turbulent atmosphere have been exacerbated and instigated by external factors. For the present, relations between Iran and GCC countries (Arabs states of Persian Gulf region) are extremely tumultuous. (Kaviani, 2009: 2)

Ethnic convergence in the Persian Gulf region:
International aspects of ethnic nationalism can be analyzed in terms of political actions (at the international and intergovernmental level) and political debates. In the domain of

genuine political action, the role of foreign governments and superpowers on the one hand and rival regional governments on the other hand in advancing and encouraging ethnic nationalism is of importance. In the domain of thoughts, in early 20th century, there was an international political discourse, in which the possibilities of having nationalist ideologies coupled with the right of autonomy provided linguistic and religious minority groups with the necessary motivations. Under such circumstances, intellectuals and political elite, envisaged a certain ethnic identity for them and assigned that identity to groups to which they belonged. That led up to the belief that their ethnic groups deserve to be called a nation and have a government. (Ahmadi, 1999: 178)

This issue in the Persian gulf region have more complications compared to the other regions. Because issues we are facing in the Persian Gulf region whether political and economic or cultural and even security are extremely contentious. These contentions have always been the source of instability in the region. The rift in identity and culture between countries that are located in the Middle East even aggravated the situation.

Detachment of archipelago of Bahrain from Iran in 1783, which set the stage for conflicts among Karim khan Zand's successors, sheikhs from Arabian peninsula occupied that place and established a government and at the same time, Sultan ben Sanni, the king of Oman, occupied southern ports of Iran and annexed Bandar Abbas, Jask, Chabahar in addition to Hormuz and Qeshm islands. At that time, Iranian government was so weak and involved in internal conflicts that it was not able to take the necessary action against those occupations and annexation. When Agha Muhammad khan consolidated his government in the Qajar era, he appointed one of the chieftains of ethnic groups who were in favour of Iran named sheikh Nasr khan al Mazkur as the governor of Bahrain and after that, he decided to castigate the king of Muscat and Oman. (Hooshang Mahdavi, 1991: 292)

Concerning the regional discussion over the Persian Gulf, in addition to Arab ethnicity, we must take the question of religion into account. Because Sunni Islam is the predominant religion in the Persian Gulf region. The sub category of Sunnism by the name of Hanafi and Shafei exist in Khuzestan province and a number of Persian Gulf islands and Lenge port. (Haghgoo, 2015: 199) So religious factor is one of the common denominators in the Middle East that can bring people together. Therefore, central government, elite, international forces and regional ethnic convergence are the abstract factors that solidify the Arab ethnic identity or pan-Arabism.now we shall be focusing on objective factors involved:

Objective factors in solidifying ethnic identity and politicization of ethnicities:
In this part, due to studies, conducted in Khuzestan province, we shall be elaborating on the condition of living of Arabs in southern part of Iran. The reason Khuzestan province has been studied is:
1: Arabs compose a large segment of the population in Khuzestan.
2: Given the fact that Khuzestan is the center of industry and production of oil, it is an important province.
3: Arabs have a history of separatist activities (presence of Arab extremist separatist groups in Khuzestan and city of Ahvaz).
4: For the present, GCC countries have invested in the concept of Arab ethnicity.
5: Khuzestan is a central province and concerns of a central province apply to it.

6: Imposed war between iran and Iraq inflicted heavy damage on this province and its capital city.

7: Terrorist operation and bombing in 2006-2007 have been attributed to Arab separatist groups such as Jabhat al Tahrir.

8: There has been implicit statements coming out of Arab world including Jamal Abdel Nasser the nationalist president of Egypt about the Arab nature of Khuzestan province. (Navah, 2010: 264).

We also know that in addition to Khuzestan province, Arabs live in Bushehr and Hormozgan. The first generation of Iranian people who were driven out of Iraq by Saddam Hosein also speaks Arabic.

It's been a while that Khuzestan province specifically the city of Ahvaz has been going through disorder. Such disorders and chaotic situations have taken place several times in the past and stem from ethnic sources. The repetition of such incidents indicates that the solidification of Arab identity among Arabs in Iran has created a cognitive dichotomy for them. Obviously, this will have reverberations and consequences as well.

Khuzestan province enjoys unique natural resources such as oil and gas and derivatives like petrochemical products. The presence of huge industrial complexes, generating electricity, fertile soil and sufficient water for agriculture make this province unique in every aspect. The consequences of the war, which was imposed upon us, are still there and this province is suffering from it. In addition, GCC countries (Arab states) are investing exorbitant amount of money to change the name of Persian Gulf and dominate new identity on southern provinces of Iran and unfortunately, they have been able to gain the support of some of the international institutions in this regard. Presence of foreign forces in the Persian gulf region coupled with the baseless claim of ownership on three islands of our countries by Arab states which is backed by extensive propaganda, have made this region strategically important for our country. (Navah, 2010: 18-19)

Having said all that, we must also touch upon the fact that in some historical instances, Arab ethnicity of Iran remained true to their country. The assistance of Arabs to the Ardeshir first in the battle against Artabanus v of Parthia, the cooperation of Arabs of Khuzestan with Arabs of Persian gulf against Sassanian Empire, resistance of Arabs against the aggression of ottoman empire to Khoramshahr, the reception Persian delegation by Arabs of Khuzestan regarding Erzurum agreement and also the resistance of Arabs during the war between Persia and Britain in Nasser al-din shah era are all examples of positive roles, played by Arabs of iran throughout the history. Concisely, the objective factors in the aggravation of Arab ethnic supremacy are as follows:

A: Social issues of Arabs of Khuzestan: studies in this regard show the mistaken policies prior to the Islamic revolution have been the cause of the problems Arabs of Iran are facing. problems including: population increase, shortage or lack of hygienic services, lack of proper housing, deficiencies in welfare services, increase in addiction rate and unemployment, etc. (Gheysari, 2003: 81).

B: Political participation: the study, which was, carried out among Arab ethnicities in Khuzestan province show that political participation and industrial activities which have been involved with ethnic sentiments have been way more than participations with nationalist sentiments. The same case is true

with respect to elections. (Hayodi, 2007: 27)

C: Economic conditions: Livelihood of highly populated low-income Arab families. Issues that the people of Khuzestan province are facing are as follows:

Despite the fact that the numbers of Arabs who have been accepted in universities have increased, they cannot have important jobs and responsibilities in the province. Arabs do not have high education or economic welfare compared to the rest of the population, but they enjoy eye-catching political knowledge. Today, an illiterate Arab youngster of Khuzestan knows the difference between Hamas and Fatah in Palestine. He is also aware of political categorizations in Iraq. This indicates that we should not take a passive stance or take the previous courses of actions towards these people and the government must take the necessary measures to bridge the gap and narrow down the differences between Arabs of Iran and central government. (Navah, 2010: 260)

Economic problems due to 8 years of war, destruction of a large part of palm trees of Abadan and khoramshahr, increase for salt in river waters due to execution of the Saccharin cultivating projects have damages the agriculture in this province.

What need to be taken care of are the possibilities of radicalization of disenfranchised Arab youth towards adversarial groups, which have underground and clandestine activities in iran. The people who are not educated and are dealing with economic hardships are susceptible to these malicious groups. This has been proven by interrogation of arrestees in terrorist events that took place around 10 years ago in this region. The level of education has a lot to do with national identity and in Khuzestan province; the level of education is low.

Khuzestan province is facing political and economic challenges. Politically, it has many different ethnicities. Economically, despite affluent resources, this province is under-developed. Culturally, tribal structure of this province has been the cause of negative nationalism and fanaticism in the province and that could lead to crisis down the road. (Hayodi, 2010: 30)

Conclusion:

What can be concluded based on the studies, in Arab-dominated parts of Iran including Khuzestan is that, the causes of Pan-Arabic sentiments among Arabs of Khuzestan are not the presence of central government of international forces, infect if elite are raising groups like grouch al-Tahrir or freedom-seeking group of Khalgh al-Arab, that's because they want to use it as a manner to express their demands and expectations. We know that the United States is pursuing the concept of so-called large Middle East. We are also aware of activities of regional powers like Saudi Arabia. We are also cognizant of the policy of centralization of governance and elimination of ethnicities. However, what is clear is that some of the problems in these Arab provinces are persisting ones. One of the most important breeding grounds, which lead to separatist moves by these groups, is economic difficulties and lack of employment opportunities. (Haghgoo, 2013: 136)

Although after the Islamic Revolution, the condition of living of border towns have improved, it is clear that the standard of living of these people did not get better from 2001 to 2011 compared to the previous decade and the people continue to feel disenfranchised relative to those who live in central parts of Iran. Therefore, domestically rooted reasons have given rise to consolidation of sense of Arab ethnic supremacy. The concept of ethnicity, which is a cultural feature, has

been politicized amongst Arabs.

It seems that in order to resolve economic issues, we must strengthen governmental protective institutions such as Imam Khomeini relief foundation or non-governmental institutions like ashireh or tayefeh relief foundation. Since the economic problems of Arabs are deeply rooted, long-term solutions would be much more helpful. The best solution is investment and employment of local task force and private sector in provincial industries.

As far as cultural measures are concern, promotion and broadcasting of different Arabic TV programs of Khuzestan provincial channel can also be considered a major step in confronting foreign political channels that enjoy great number of viewers.

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