

Impact of ports and International waters accessibility on national security improvement in Iran

Nazemi Mohammad¹, Karamoozian Mostafa²

1. M.A. in HR management, shahid Dadbin engineering college, Kerman, nazemi72@yahoo.com

2. Navy Engineer, researcher at IRGC., naval studies center, Bandar Abbas, parsa.karamuz@yahoo.com

Abstract

For any state, national security is at the top of the list of most wanted! The notion of security is now expanded beyond its traditional military concept and is identified by five sectors: military, economic, societal, political, and environmental. All countries that have access to international waters try their best to use it as an economic, political and martial advantage over their regional and non-regional competitors. As access to international waters induces a direct effect on the level and quality of national security, so, in this paper which is of a review kind after a short review of definition of security and its elements, present conditions of these elements in Iranian southern ports are discussed. Seemingly, potential advantages of access to international waters, especially economic and political ones, have not been practically met by the state in previous decades. Finally, some suggestions are provided to get better security advantages of access to international waters by the country.

Keywords: access to international waters, ports, national security, Iran.

Introduction

Access to international waters has always been considered as an advantage for the nations since ancient era. Imagine a time when land transportation was done with the least speed and meantime the merchants and army leaders could deliver their goods and soldiers via sea transportation in few days or weeks, a job that would take a year or many months on land at the time! The advantages and disadvantages of sea accessibility, of course, were not limited to commerce; it would include military aspects also. Access to international waters from one side would increase military maneuverability and power and from the other a threat; because the opponents and competitors could use this potential advantage to attack and over take, too.

Ports have always been distinctive cities, culturally, socially, and even anthropologically. From the beginning of human civilization to the present time, ports have been considered as effective and important cities and they have played an outstanding role in flourishing and developing of countries and political systems. Alexandria and Aden in ancient time and Shanghai, Singapore and even Dubai in present time have an undeniable role in development of their nation and state.

On the other side, security has been a primary fundamental need for human kind from the very first day to the present time. Many scientists have claimed that security is a basic need for man kind. Maslow, 1943, for the first time in his theory “hierarchy of needs”, represented as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom, spoke of security need as the most important need after physiological needs [1].

The perception of security has reviewed and re-described during the history. At the beginning, security meant only warlike security and along with the development of civilizations and states this context has included a wider definition so that today the professionals outline five aspects of economic, social, political, martial, and environmental security as a whole frame for security when they talk about it in regard to sustainable development.

In this paper it is decided to investigate the effect and impact of access to international waters on security in Iran. As to overcome the limitation of time and page, here, security is considered only in economic, martial, and political concepts.

Pondering on the tile one can realize that contact to international waters could bring plenty of advantages to a country while simultaneously, encountering the country some threats and challenges also. So, those states that consider this matter in their long term planning and strategies may benefit this accessibility from one side and convert the challenges to opportunities

from the other. Iran, fortunately, has a water boundary in south that provides the country with an access to Indian Ocean. This access along with Iranian southern ports development may play a vital role in maintaining and promotion of national security of the country and even the security of the region and Middle East.

Security

The word “security” means the state of being free from danger or threat. It is also defined as the safety of a state or organization against criminal activity such as terrorism, theft, or espionage [2].

Security is an inherently subjective concept. In a constructivist understanding of the world, which stresses the relative nature of phenomena in international relations, security cannot be objectively measured. There is no way of determining how insecure any actor – be it an individual, a community, or a state – really is, and inferences can only be made based on their statements and actions [3].

Moreover, the notion of security now extends beyond its traditional, state-based, military concept. The experts who have been developing a broad understanding of security, has identified five security sectors: military; environmental; economic; social; and political [4].

The military sector of security concerns the two-level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states and states’ perceptions of each other’s intentions. The political factor involves the organization stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. The economic factor considers the access to resources, finance and markets that is necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. The societal factor is about sustainability within acceptable conditions for the evolution of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, national identity and custom. The environmental factor incorporates the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend [5].

Economic security

Today the world economy has become globalized. The economic system is changing from one with distinct local and national markets, separated by trade barriers, distance, time, and culture, to one that is increasingly converging and integrating into a global economy.[6] From economic point of view, ports have many effective economical roles which are vital for the sustainable development for a developing country like Iran. Regarding the geopolitical and economical situation of Iranian southern ports in supporting economic security of the country, the most outstanding features and roles of the ports are as follow:

Transportation role: Modern production techniques and consumption patterns increase the use of transportation systems beyond levels suggested purely by the growth in trade and commerce. As a result, more specialized handling, storage, and other logistics facilities are needed. More and more, ports are becoming part of integrated logistics chains [7]. This process of specialization and changing demands, which has taken place over the last two decades in most Western countries, is now taking place with even greater speed in new market economies. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the United States was the world's leading trader in 1998, accounting for about one billion tons of ocean-bound trade (about 20 percent of the world's total ocean-bound trade) out of about 2.4 billion tons of total foreign trade. In 2000, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, approximately \$736 billion of goods (about 40 percent of the total U.S. foreign trade by dollar amount) were shipped via ocean vessels and passed through U.S. ports. By 2020, international trade is estimated to more than double (by weight) within the United States, with the majority of this trade projected to move via ocean shipping.

According to the data provided by the World Trade Centre, in 2010, Iran has imported 65 and exported 101 billion dollar goods and in 2014, these figures were 52 and 89 billion dollars respectively. There is no doubt that most of these goods have been transported via water [8]. In forth coming years in which sanctions are omitted, the state needs to develop ports and water ways to meet the adjusted goals

The data show the outstanding role of ports in import and export transportation sector of the country. Also its dependence on seas and waterways has been vital to its economic success and security.

The annual capacity of Iranian ports will increase to 200 million tons by the end of the Fifth Development Plan (2010-2015). According to the strategic plan of the ministry of commerce, industry, and mines the capacity of container loading and unloading in the country's ports will increase to 7 million by the end of 2015. Although this growth is outstanding but it is not satisfying the economic needs of 21st. century [9]. Iran has to ,also, develop South- North rail roads and high ways because the international waters accessibility is only at the southern ports and to be efficient and cost satisfactory, the southern ports must be connected to main industrial zones and cities. Otherwise, developing the ports facilities is not the only key to the sustainable development on transportation, itself.

Industrial development for the purpose of added value: Today, ports seek to attract enterprises that extend their logistics chains or provide them with specialized capabilities to add value to cargoes that are stored and handled in the port [10]. From the 1950s, the larger European ports targeted refineries and chemical industries for co location and co development, with considerable success. Thus, for example, a large cluster of five refineries and many chemical-processing companies located in the Port of Rotterdam as a direct result of public policies developed in 1950s. A cluster of world-class, specialized marine services likewise established themselves in the Port of Rotterdam as a result of the good locality connections and the gas and oil finds in the North Sea. Another example of cluster development is the Port of Colombo; a fashion goods and apparel industry cluster has developed around Colombo, which focuses on reliable, short-transit container services to complete just-in-time purchase orders[11].

These days, the commercial success of a port could stem from a productivity advantage in traditional cargo-handling service, from value-added service, or from a combination of the two. Productivity advantages come mainly from economies of scale and economies of scope, suggesting that the most productive ports will be those that are equipped to handle large cargo volumes and/or significantly reduce unit costs through efficient management [12].

Regarding the amazing reservoirs of Oil in South of Iran and Cupper and Iron mines pretty near Bandar Abbas from one side and the problem of bulk raw exporting of these minerals from the other side, the need for establishing refineries and factories for the purpose of adding value to these minerals is severely sensed! Some of these industries need plenty amount of water and need to be structured near sea. Although locating these industries somewhere near the raw material resources and international transportation paths is itself a feasibility reasoning factor that persuades officials to decide to build these industrial complexes in southern ports along the vast water margins something which has not been deeply cared about by the politicians and policy makers.

Growth pole policy: Many governments are directly or indirectly involved in port development. They often use a growth pole argument to justify the direct financing of basic port infrastructure. This growth pole rationale derives from the belief that investments in port assets have strong direct and indirect multiplier effects on the entire national economy and, further, that the commitment of public resources is necessary to encourage investment by the commercial and industrial sectors [13]. Unfortunately, southern ports of Iran are not even among developed regions and areas of the country and it seems that growth pole policy must be rapidly evaluated and employed in the region. This will lead to absorb financial investment needed for developing infrastructures, transportation, tourism facilities, and industrial complexes.

Iran's international waters access has another political advantage and that is the negotiation on taking goods and specially Oil of northern countries like Azerbaijan and Armenia at the place and exporting the same amount via southern ports. This will provide the country with a kind of political leverage to be used in foreign affairs and relations.

Political security

For much of the contemporary history of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf has stood at the center of the region's strategic significance. At the same time, the Gulf has been wracked by political instability and tension. Today, the region is undergoing profound changes that range from rapid economic and infrastructural development to turbulent social and cultural transformations. Focusing on the key factors that give the Persian Gulf its strategic significance, contributors look at the influence of vast deposits of oil and natural gas on international politics, the impact of the competing centers of power of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the nature of relationships among countries within the Persian Gulf, and the evolving interaction between Islam and politics [14].

Persian Gulf plays as a bridge to connect Iran to international waters. Being located in exigent region of Middle East, the competition of Shiite and Sunni in the region, the political circumstances of world after 9/11, and the Hormoze trait being totally controlled by Iran; all have provided the country with simultaneous thread and opportunities. Undoubtedly, the most important players of the region are Iran and US. The more the US keeps its presence in the region the less national interests of Iran are met. Fortunately, Iran's accessibility to international waters has been accompanied with the passing of main amount of the world energy through Hormoze strait. The country needs to maintain and increase its share of Oil production, if it aims to be one of the most powerful deliverers of world energy and this needs a vast investment in oil and mining industries.

International waters accessibility has put forward a chance to re build constructive political and economical relations with Persian Gulf countries. An effort that could be resulted in diminishing the presence of third party countries in the region and this in turn may lead to a political security advantage for the country and for the region. A professional and effective foreign policy may convince Arab countries in south of Persian Gulf that being in Iran's side is less costly and more reliable and may bring them a chance to effectively take part in the region's security processes. In addition, international waters accessibility has created a situation in which Iran is connected to Middle East Arab countries; it also gives an indirect access to India and its fast growing economy and market.

One other political advantage provided via this accessibility is the access to half billion population of nearby countries most of them being Muslims and a billion population in India, and to the North Africa countries. Today, no one denies the role of Africa in forth coming years of the world, economically and politically. Strategic planning needs to review and rebuild the cultural relations through diplomatic and even touristic and scientific relationships. Iranians progress in science and new technologies is a competitive advantage that must not be neglected. Establishing international universities, tourism activities, and scientific research centers in southern ports and cities will finally result in political security of central state and public administration.

The first signs of Russian interest in the Gulf emerged in 2007 when President Putin toured the region; this was the first time a Russian leader had visited the GCC. Since then, Russia has played a key political role in the Middle East, outmaneuvering the West on Syria and becoming a critical partner in negotiations with Iran. These concerns have pushed Moscow to advocate its position on these issues and engage in direct talks with Gulf countries. It would, however, be wrong to suppose the Russians only see the GCC as a land of endless economic opportunities. In fact, Russia's primary goal is to influence the policies of Gulf States toward other issues in the Middle East [15].

Another political advantage that IW accessibility puts on the table of Iranian politicians is the strategic need of Russia to access the Middle East and Indian Ocean. After 9/11 and Afghanistan war, Iran is the only secured and trusted path for Russia to access the Middle East and Persian Gulf states and even Indian Ocean. This is a unique political opportunity for Iranian politicians to gather the fruits! After a long period of staying passive in the region, now Russia is after its strategic interests in the Middle East and West east and specially the Oil delivery corridor of Persian Gulf. Russia urgently needs Iran for achieving this aim both for its direct access to IW and for the fact that Iran is the only country in the region in which no foot prints of US is seen yet. On the other side, this is a political leverage in hands of Iranians to use it when negotiating America.

Military security

Balance of power: The prevailing view in the West, especially in the United States, and in the Arab world maintains that "balance of power" is the major guarantee of security and stability in the Persian Gulf region. From this perspective, while the traditional form of balance of power between Iran and Iraq provided security for the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, it favored the interests of foreign actors, especially the United States. Proponents of such a view hold that following the overthrow of the Baathist regime in Iraq and the growth of Iran's role and influence in the region, the international community ought to establish a new kind of balance of power to restrain the Islamic Republic of Iran, and thereby preserve the security of the region. Following its failure to redefine the position of the new Iraq in terms of a new balance of power, the United States has itself tried to play such a role in the region [16].

From the outset of the Iraq crisis in 2003, Iran has ceaselessly competed with the US to institutionalize and enhance its new roles in the region. Like it or not, the US has to admit the power of Iran specially in securing the Oil passing flow and has to accept an Iranian role in the region's new security architecture in the form of a balance of security. If America is so militarily active in the region, it is because of its navy force maneuverability and power. So, access to international waters has brought a simultaneous thread and opportunity. Why opportunity? Because this presence has given an unwanted choice to Iranian navy force to compete with the world's superpower! Undoubtedly, one main reason of Iranian surprising developments in naval and military sectors is the US vast scale military presence in the region. A kind of presence being bestowed by international waters accessibility! Iran and the United States are currently the only two regional and trans-regional actors that are able to conduct military operations in the region.

Increase in Iran's importance and its regional role and changes in the nature of security challenges all together with the new political developments in post-invasion Iraq and whole region; Iran's contribution to the regional security arrangement should therefore be defined based on its new role. The logic for Iran's increasing role is derived from inherent sources of natural power particularly from cultural, social and geopolitical aspects of which any underestimation would be damaging to the any regional security system. During the last two decades, the presence of foreign powers (specially the US) around Iran's borders and threatening this country, has disrupted the endogenous balance of power at regional level and has led to mistrust between regional states [17].

Martially access to regional countries: Iran has a centralized political administration. As ideology of Shiite forms the main body of political administration, so, having a rapid physical access to most Sunni and Shiite countries, some of them being Iran's traditional opponents or alleys, will again provide a militia- political leverage and serve as a path for rapid response at the time of any crises. For instance, if the political system of Iran decides to deliver some help to Syria, it needs to have a permission from Iraq or Turkey to use their space or land for the assumed help delivery. But, in Yemen crises, this permission and coordination is not needed because the IW accessibility in south supplies the country with the opportunity to deliver its presence, if any.

Developing a domestically made navy force: To meet security threats, states have invested in costly arms imports, and military establishments are large without being effective. Servicing and maintaining this equipment and making the military effective are still distant prospects. For the foreseeable future, the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states will continue to rely on the United States and its allies for security against major threats [18].

Iran has given the modernization of its naval forces high priority and has also improved its ports and strengthened its air defenses, while obtaining some logistic and technical support from nations like India and Pakistan. In August 2000, the Islamic Republic announced that it had launched its first domestically-produced light submarine, which is called the Al-Sabiha 15. It can be used for reconnaissance and laying mines [19].

In military sector, the international accessibility has conveyed simultaneous threads and opportunities although through a wise political process and movement some of these threads could be converted to opportunities. The main threat is the

presents of US navy forces at the water borders. On the other hand dependence of regional countries on US military support has led them not to create and develop a domestic military sector and this, in turn, has resulted in Iran being the main country with domestically made military forces and equipments in the region. Unlike previous years in which Iran's air and navy fleet were entirely western made, Iran's Air and navy forces fleet are increasingly becoming domestically developed.

Summary and conclusion

Iran's accessibility to international waters in south has supplied the country with significance opportunities and threads. On the base of security which is defined as political, economical, and martial; the country has taken the martial advantage of this accessibility to strengthen and develop its military forces especially navy force so that Iran and the US are the only countries that can perform military operations in the region. Unlike previous years in which Iran's air and navy fleet were entirely western made, they are now increasingly becoming domestically made.

Unfortunately, political and economical security opportunities that could be taken from this accessibility are not achieved completely and most of them are left potential. International water accessibility has provided the country the immediate access to some important countries in the region that do not have a direct border with Iran. Yemen and India are two good examples, the first for political purposes and the second for economic ones. On the other side, the urgent will of Russia to penetrate in the Middle East, regarding Iran being the best path, has supplied Iran with potential political and even martial advantages. Another potential economic opportunity yet not practically met is the bridging role of Iran to connect northern countries to international waters.

International waters accessibility, Oil-rich resources in south, valued mineral reservoirs near south ports all have indeed provided Iran with a chance to accelerate its economic growth, but the lack of adding- value industries and proper transportation lines to connect ports to different parts of the country; has darkened the horizon of sustainable development in these sectors.

References:

1. Maslow, A.H., A theory of human motivation, *Psychological review*, 50(4), pp 370-396, 1943.
2. Oxford advanced learners dictionary, oxford university press, 2014..
3. Warner, J.F., & Meissner, R., The politics of security in the Okavango River Basin: From civil war to saving wetlands (1975-2002) – a preliminary security impact assessment' in Pachova, 2008.
4. Emmers, R., 'Securitization' in Allan, C. (ed.), 2007, *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford University Press, Bath, p. 110, 2007.
5. Kibaroglu, A., Brouma, A.D., & Erdem, M., , 'Transboundary water issues in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin: Some methodological approaches and opportunities for cooperation' in Pachova, 2008.
6. Held, D. and McGrew, A. *The Global Transformations Reader*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000.
7. Saeidi, N., Jafari, H., Ameli, A. aluation the Role of Logistics Centers In the Development of Iranian Seaports, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 4(12), 2013.
8. World Trade Centre, retrieved at.com [www.world trade map.com](http://www.worldtrade.com), 2010.
9. Iranian ministry of industry, commerce, and mines, Strategic plan of development, transportation chapter. 2014.

10. Jean, P.R. The Benefits of Logistics Investments. Technical notes, Inter-American Development Bank, Department of Infrastructure and Environment. 2012.
11. Baird, A. J., “Port Privatization, Objectives, Extent, Process, and the United Kingdom Experience.” 4th World Port Privatization Conference, 22–24 September 1999.
12. Bichou, K. & Gray, R. A critical review of conventional terminology for classifying seaports. *Policy and Practice*, 39(1), pp. 75-92. 2005.
13. Banister D., Berechman, J. *Investment and Economic Development in Transport*, UCL press, London, p.59.2000.
14. Barzgar, K., Iran, New Iraq and the Persian Gulf Political Security Architecture, *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 20(1), ppl.: 93-110, 2007.
15. Barmin, Y., *Russia’s Deep Dive into the Persian Gulf*, Muftah organization, 2014.
16. Kamrava, M., *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, Syracuse University Press. 2011.
17. Barzegar, K., *The Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf: An Iranian View*, *Middle East Policy*, 17(3), pp: 78-87. 2010.
18. Chubin, SH., *The Persian Gulf: Security, Politics, and Order*, p935, 2010.
19. Cordesman, A.H. and Burke chair, A.A. *Iran’s Developing Military Capabilities*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC., 2004.