

The Analysis of Geopolitics of Minorities in Iran A Case Study of Turkmen

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Abstract

Understanding geographical realities and on top of that, human phenomena, can serve as suitable solutions to the politicians of countries. Today, the places and the positions of countries in the modern world system are determined on the basis of their structures and, right or wrong functions. Special geographical structure of the Iranian nation emerged out of two conjoined parts-central and marginal (Hafeznia 2002). The central part is considered as the main body of the nation in terms of tribal, lingual, cultural, religious, spatial, consistent and equal characteristics. Contrary to the central part, the marginal part is scattered and contains a collection of various cultural and tribal groups. One of the influential factors of a nation's unifying structure is the balanced cooperation of tribes and components of a nation in determining the destiny and national affairs of the country. In the current society of Iran, there is no pattern of balanced cooperation. The marginal part does not have that much share in the national affairs of Iran. That is why; Turkmen do not have that much sense of belongingness to the central part and to the Capital of Iran.

Introduction

In the beginning of 20th century, the ultimate objective of Geopolitics, which should be considered as the supporter of realities, was the acquisition of power (Ezzati 2001). There are a lot of factors contributing to this geopolitical objective and that is why geopolitical thoughts and ideas have been formed. Paying or not paying attention to the evolutionary trend of the world, determines whether those in charge of international relations are, in fact, inclined towards these geopolitical evolutions and changes or not. With regard to the future, developed countries conjoin all geopolitical concepts with future objectives and national benefits. On the other hand, other countries try to find

remedial guidelines after being confronted with difficulties.

The latter group of countries considers all the affairs stemming out of their mind and want to solve collective crises with their own mindset. The difficulty of such nations becomes more complicated when they have access to abundant sources of energy.

In the 20th century, geopolitical ideas and suppositions were more under the influence of military strategies, but such thinking could not be turned into practice. This was a factor in changing the geopolitical concepts and suppositions in the twentieth century. In the present century, two subjects were taken more into consideration: human factor and economic factor, with all its complica-

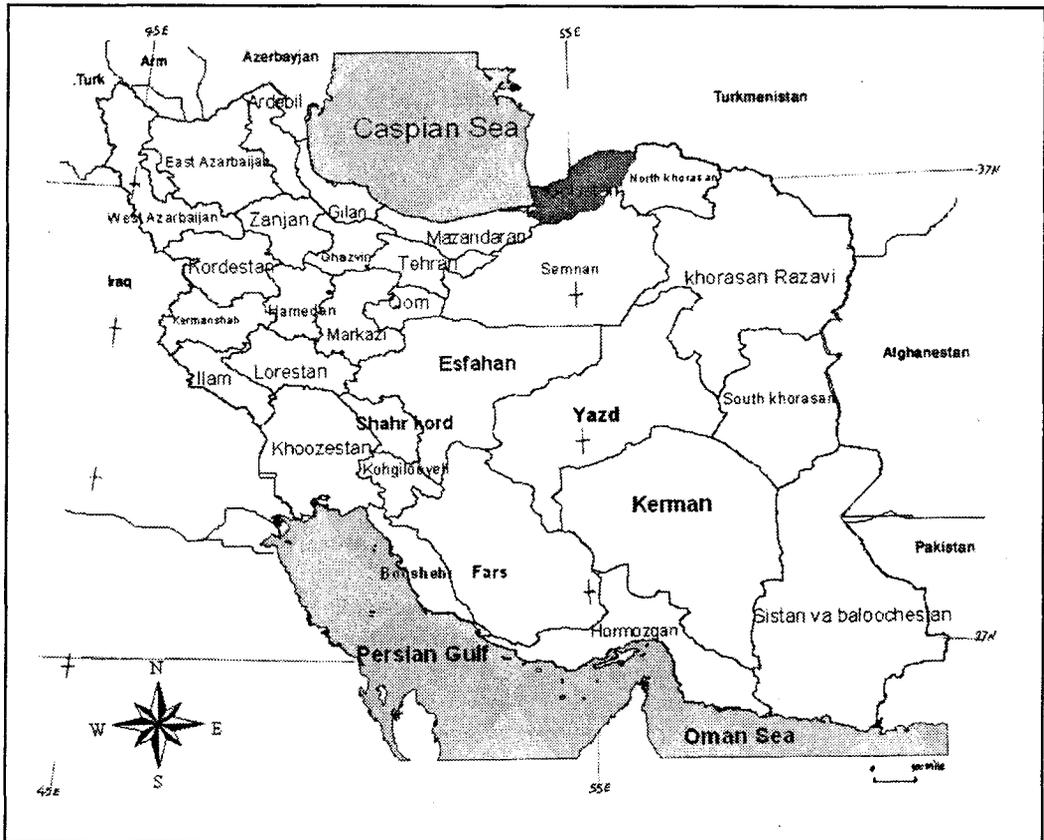


Fig. 1: Golestan in Iran

Source: www.googleearth.com

tions. As a result of these evolutions, social, cultural, and military-security factors are affected as well. The necessity of thinking is essential that the 21st century world could be turned into a system in which the countries determine their place in the modern world system according to the structure and, true or false functions. Understanding geographical realities and above all human phenomena can serve as solutions to the politicians of countries. Accordingly, they can enter the scene into the world as the major players and can find out that being heedless towards the geopolitical codes paves the way to the lack of real development and security.

The study area: The area of the present study is Golestan a province in Iran.

Location: Iran is located between the latitudes $44^{\circ} 5'$ and $63^{\circ} 18' N$. and longitudes $25^{\circ} 3'$ and $39^{\circ} 47' E$. (Fig. 1). Iran bounded by it Azerbaijan republic, Armanistan and Turkmenistan in the north, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the east, Iraq and Turkey in the west. Iran covers an area of 1,648,195 sq. km. The resident population of Iran is 70,000,000 distributed in 30 provinces and the capital city, Tehran.

Golestan province, in the north of Iran, is located between the latitudes $36^{\circ} 30'$ and $38^{\circ} 15' N$. and longitudes $54'$ and $56' E$. The

province has an area of 20,000 sq.km. The resident population of Golestan is 1,500,000 are 500,000 of it Turkmen. According to the most recent divisions the province is divided into eleven counties: Bandar gaz, Kurdkoy, Bandar Turkman, Agh ghala, Ali abad, Ramiyan, Azad Shahr, Mino Dasht, Kalale, Gonbad Kavos and Gorgan. It is bounded in the west by Mazandaran province, in the north by Turkmenistan country, in the south by Semnan province and in the east by North Khorasan province (Fig.1).

Special-geographical structure of the Iranian nation emerged out of two conjoined parts viz central and marginal areas (Hafeznia 2002). The Central part occupies expansive space of Iranian geography and there is a relative symmetry among its factors. The people of this part are considered as the main body of a nation in terms of tribal, lingual, cultural, religious, spatial, consistent and equal characteristics. That is, by the presence of small local cultures in this part, all the individuals are religiously Shiite Moslems and their language is Persian. They are Iranians in terms of public culture, and in the meantime, they are living in a consistent space of Iran plateau and its nearby heights. Combination and overlapping of this layer and fundamental and multilayered characteristics in the central part contributed to the density and homogeneity of the people in this area.

Contrary to the central part, people living in the marginal parts and plains and elevated regions of Iran are scattered and consists to a various collection of cultural and tribal groups. In some aspects the people of the marginal part of the country are different from the central part such as language, accent, tribalism, religion, and small local

cultures. In the marginal part of Iran , there are minorities like Azeri in the northwest, Kurd in the west, Balooch in the east, Arab in the south and Turkmen in the north. The residential regions of these tribes lack spatial-geographical consistency. Sunni religious minorities are divided into two sects of Hanafi and Shafiee which are scattered in the marginal part of the country. It is interesting to note that all the above minorities are scattered geographically even beyond the political borders of Iran. (Fig. 2)

One of the influential factors of a nation's unifying structure is the balanced cooperation of tribes and different citizens of a nation which in turn determines the destiny and national interests of the country. In the current society of Iran, there is no pattern of balanced cooperation. The marginal part does not have that much share in the national affairs of Iran. That is why Kurds, Balooches, Turkmens, and even Arabs do not have that much sense of belongingness to the central part and the capital of Iran.

In recent years, a special interest has been shown by those involved in political geography and humanities to unite the central part of a country to the marginal part.

At the larger level, the interpretation of the concept "axis-margin" was very important in the analysis of global systems. This concept can be raised to the super national level like Emanuel Walerstein who divided Europe into a formidable and influential axis in the northwest, a stagnant half-marginal region in the south, and a dependant agricultural region in the east. Moreover, this concept is applied at the national level and in examining tensions and inequalities caused by geographical, cultural, and economical variety within a country (Muir 1997).



Fig. 2: Minorities in Iran

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The nature of evolution of industrial communities can be best found in their civil laws especially in their attitude towards individuals in that community. In old communities ordinary people were called 'peasants' while they are now being called 'citizens'. In the democratic communities, all the citizens equally and completely participate in all the policy-making activities (Lanski).

By ongoing industrial revolution and industrial development, tribal and ethnic minorities demanded equal rights and more extensive role in industrial world and getting access to equal jobs and positions, housing in the city, better wages, public education, and so on (Aloween). The present Iran is in fact the abridged Iran which has an experienced government which is working towards the political unity in the present

realm. Minorities in Iran have a special spatial-geographical situation. The issues such as the rate of political, social, cultural, and economical participation of minorities have direct relationship with geopolitics. But the question that emerges here is 'What are the strategies for raising the level of convergence'?

The researcher has come up with the following hypothesis in the research process which needs to be scrutinized. There is significant difference in culture and historical background between Turkmen and other Iranian people. Hence it is attempted in this paper to find out as to what extent there is difference in culture, history of Turkmen and Iranian majority. To obtain the targets set, the researcher has made use of library sources to collect the data through studying and reading books, articles, descriptive and analytically available sources.

1.4 Background of the Study

While studying the political geography of Iran, especially the importance and the role of this country at national and regional level, this kind of research and investigation becomes necessary. But some issues, and restrictions especially lack of research background have made it difficult.

The term 'Geopolitics' was first proposed by Rudolf Kilman of Sweden (1864-1922). Political geography and geopolitics are two complementary discussions of one scientific subject, and they study the role of political 'power' in a geographical environment. Studying this role of a country necessitates the study of political geography in the framework of power, while global and regional functions of this mechanism lie in the realm of geopolitics (Mojtahed Zade)

There are many factors considered to be influencing the geopolitics in any country:

1. **Static factors** such as geographical situation, topographical situation (ruggedness, waters, and borders)
2. **Dynamic factors** including population, resources, political and social context and characteristics of international system (transformation of global power centers).

1.5 Historical Background of Turkmen Tribe

The Turks established their primary government called "Guk Turks" (celestial and powerful Turks) in Orkhun under the leadership of their first commander called Bumin Khan in 552 A.D. "Oghuz" was first mentioned in the engravings which remained of this period. Based on this fact, they should be regarded as one of the largest constituent tribes (tribes union) of Guk Turks. Right after that Guk Turks were divided into two groups e.g. Eastern Turks and Western Turks. Oghuz was placed within the tribal union of Western Turks. But the most important question: what is the origin and genealogy of Oghuz and the Turkmens?

Many Iranian historians, including Balaami, Yaghubi, Masoudi, Yazdi, Khaje Rashid-e-din Fazl-o-Allah, Ghaffari... trace the mythological period of the Turks and Turkmens from Noah's flood. The most comprehensive authentic work is Rashid-e-din Fazl-o-Allah's book called *Jame-a-Tavarikh* (Comprehensive Histories). The tribes which have been labeled and called Turks from ancient times up to now, lived in deserts, mountains, and the woodlands of Ghapchagh, Rus, Jar, Bashghard, Ang-hare River and in the proximity of what are

known as Turkistan and Oyghurestan. Later they gained dominance over China, India, Kashmir, Iran, Rome, Syria, and Egypt. He then adds that Prophet Noah had three sons called Japheth, Sam, and Ham. Japheth was the common ancestor of the Turks and the Mongoloids. Sam lived in the Middle East and he was the ancestor of the Arabs and the Iranians. Ham who lived in Hindustan was the ancestor of the Negroes. Therefore, these brothers were the common ancestors of all the present human beings. Japheth was probably a prophet leading a nomadic life. He spent the summers in Ortagh and Kurtagh which were high and huge mountains and in Iinaj city in Mongolia. He spent winters in Orsugh, Ghaghiyan, and Gharaghum in Mongolia. He had seven sons, one of whom was called Turk, who is the common ancestor of all Turks. Turk had four sons. Tutek, one of his sons, had a son called Elije Khan. His son, Dib Baghuee Khan was the father of Guk Khan. He had a son called Aalinje Khan who had two sons: Mongol and Tartar who were the ancestors of the Mongols and the Tartars respectively. Mongol had four sons called Gharakhan, Ourkhan, Gurkhan, and Guzkhan. Gharakhan after marriage, had a child called **Oghuz Khan** who is the common ancestor and father of all Turkmens. He was the first one to believe in God.

After the death of Oghuz, Gun Khan, the eldest his six sons, became his successor. Each of Oghuz's grand sons had four sons the total of whom comes to twenty four. Turkmens believe that the foundation of the Turkmen tribe stems from these twenty four nephews who were Oghuz's sons. Gun Khan assigned an animal for representing their Onghun for these twenty four. The names of these twenty four people, their seals and Onghun are still available.

These twenty four Oghuz tribe, lived in the central plateau of Iran and the vast plains of central Asia, since ancient times and following their ancestors, nomadic life. In the vast and endless deserts of Seihun and Kharazm and the Caspian Sea, they grazed their flocks. They raised numerous horses, dauntless warriors, and strong archer riders. They were constantly in a moving state in search of gaining new grasslands and pastures. Day by day, their population, military power, and territory were on the rise and they gained more strength. Their economy was dependant on grazing and raising flocks. Their movements were less towards the east (Mongolia) and more towards the west, central Asian countries, including Iran and eastern European countries, and later even to the North African countries like Egypt. The reason why they could not attack, like their ancestors, the northern and southern parts of their inhabited regions was the fact that the severe cold of Siberia and the icy areas of the pole prevented them from advancing, and they were blocked by the Great Ocean from the east. That is why they were always on the move towards the west. They crossed the Caspian Sea and surrounding areas to find suitable grasslands and pastoral regions.

1. 6 Oghuz-Turkmen

According to the great Turkologist, Major Nemet, the word 'Oghuz' is consisted of two separate words of 'Ogh' meaning tribe and 'Uz' the Turkish plural form. Thus, the word 'Oghuz' means 'tribes'. However, Arazbai Guayef believes that the meaning of 'ogh' is 'earth' and 'uz' is 'sky', the combination of which means 'earth and sky' signifying 'sovereignty'.

From the Turkology viewpoint, Omlin Pristak the famous Turkologist believes that

the word 'Turkmen' is a collective noun comprised of the word 'Turk' and the suffix 'man' or 'men', since the people who lived in central Asia were called Turkmen were known as 'Turk' without the suffix of 'man' or 'men' according to the Russian sources of the Kiev period. According to Minureski, the interpretation offered by Jin Deny in his book can be the most proper signification of the term 'Turkmen'. Based on this interpretation, 'Turkmen' is composed of 'Turk' and the suffix 'men' which, in Turkish language, is indicative of 'intensification' or 'magnification'. According to this theory, 'Turkmen' probably means 'Turk Poursang' or in Italian language 'Turkun'. Deny, the celebrated French researcher, emphasizing on the grammar of the Turkish language, in 1921, says that the word 'Turkmen' or 'Turkman' is derived from 'Ghazha', and believes that the suffix 'men' or 'man' in Turkish language conveys the same sense as the words like Ghojamaan (Enorme), Gharamaan (Tre Brun), and Shishmaan (Enfle obese) indicating respectively exaggeration, plenty, and enormity. It can thus be concluded that the term 'Turkmaan' is the combination of 'Turk' and 'man' meaning strong Turk, or noble and pure Turk.

1. 7 Term of Turkmen in Iran

The term of Turkmen has been used by Iranian historians like Beihaghi and Gardizi since the 11th century. Of the dynasties who ruled over Iran, Ghara-Ghuyun-Lu (873-77 M.Y) and Agh-Ghuyun-Lu (800-906 M.Y) can be mentioned. Turkmen are among the Turkish tribes of central Asia who preserved their ethnic characteristics after the invasion of the Mongols and settled in different countries including Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq. From earlier times, Tukmens were

involved in war and disputes among each other. The only common ground which is shared by all of them was Literature, that is, they considered the renowned Turkmen poet, Makhtom Gholi Faraghi (second half of the 18th and first half of the 19th century), as their national poet. Turkmen are divided into two large tribes of Yumut and Guglen. Guglens have six sub-divisions living in the center and east of Turkmen Sahra and Yumuts have two sub-divisions of Atabai and Jafarbai living in the west of Turkmen Sahra.

1.8 The Social History of Turkmen

The social history of the Turkmen is divided into three main periods as follows:

- 1) Nomadic period in central Asia along with other fellow Oghuz and Turkish ethnic groups who were constantly in search of water and pastures.
- 2) Gradual immigration period of small and large tribes and their movement towards the west (presentday Turkmenistan and the eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea) sometimes towards the south of Afghanistan and also towards Atrak River in Golestan Province.
- 3) The period after the famous battle of Guk Tappe (1881 A.D) and Akhal Treaty (1944 A.D) which led not only to the creation of the borderline between Iran and Russia on both sides of the Atrak River, but it also divided the large tribe of Turkmen into two major groups. The groups which were on the other side of the border (north of Atrak River) was under the dominion of the Russians and the group in the south of Atrak Rive whichr was under the dominion of Iran.

In 1991, the Turkmen reached their age-old aim of having an independent country and the Turkmenistan Republic was formed beyond the borders of Iran. Its capital is Ashgabat and after 47 years, they could travel between the two countries (Iran and Turkmenistan) to visit their relatives. For more and better understanding of the culture and history of the Turkmen, an international conference on Turkmen history was held in Makhtum Gholi Faraghi University in Ashgabat two years later i.e. in 1993.

After the implementation of Reza Shah's Takhte Ghapu¹ policy (1925-1941), Iranian Turkmen were settled and nowadays they are engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade in the fertile land of Turkmen Sahra. Traditionally, they are warmhearted, hospitable, and unpretentious people. Currently, they make one third of the 1.5 million population of Golestan Province. They are settled in the areas stretched from the western part of the Caspian Sea to Gullidagh in the borderline cities and villages. Gonbad-e-Kavus, Bandar Turkmen, Agh-ghala, and Gomishan are the major Turkmen residential places. The special dress of Turkmen women is distinguished and different from other women residents of this province.

1.9 Religion and Culture of the Turkmen

After the entrance of Islam in Khorasan and central Asia and after years of strivings, the Turkmen tribes gradually converted to Islam. Their largest cities including Samarghand, Tashkand, Khiveh, Marv, and Bukhara were converted to Islam as well. Nowadays, Turkmen of Iran are Moslems following the Hanafi doctrine of Islam.

1. A policy that forced Turkmen nomads to settle in a predestined locations.

Festivities of Turkmen

For the Turkmen, the month of Ramadan is followed by special prayers and festivities. During the nights of Ramadan, prayer performers try to gather in mosques to perform Taravah prayer in groups which they call 'Tarawa'. This prayer involves 20 Rakaat. Koran Khatm prayer is performed in groups and it lasts for about five or seven days. 'Ghughun' derived from the root word of 'Ghugh' means 'smell' and it is applied to festivity two days before Eid-e-Fetr (28th of Ramadan). On this ceremonial day, they cook special bread and sweets. One of the greatest festivities of Turkmen is Ghorban Bairam (Eid-e-Ghorban) which is well prepared far in advance. They wear new clothes and celebrate it for three days which mainly involves paying visits to each other.

Turkmen Carpets

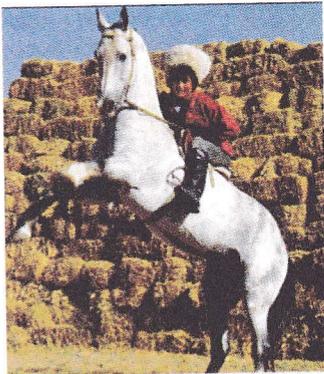
Turkmen rugs and carpets are very famous inside and outside Iran. Turkmen designs and patterns follow the same style in spite of their local and tribal discrepancies. From a historical perspective, there is no doubt that weaving rugs and carpets emerged and thrived originally from among the herdsmen and then among villagers.

Turkmen Alachigh

Basically, Turkmen are known in Iran and everywhere by the three specifications of horse, rug, and alachigh. In fact, leading nomadic life in central Asia was the root cause of these specifications. Alachigh is a felt house or a black tent (a kind of alachigh).

Turkmen Horse

Because of the requirements of their lives, the Oghuz of the vast steppe of central Asia have



Source: www.turkmensahra.org

great interest and consideration for horses, as their nomadic life style was strongly tied to horses. The festival of the Turkmen horse is still held in Turkmenistan every year, and in Golestan Province, horse racing competitions have many aficionados.

1.10 Conclusion and Suggestions

Not only marginal population and ethnic groups of Iran have different situations, but their political behaviors are also somewhat dependant on relative homogeneity with the central part and extent of interference of foreign forces. Kurd, Balooch, and Turkmen ethnic groups have similar situations, but the manifestation of their behavior relies on the extent of national participation, and global and regional necessities.

Political movements of marginal ethnic groups of Iran generally date back to one century, especially after the Mashrute Revolution² which was a turning point in the new political history of Iran.

The distinguishing aspect of this period is that the role people played in politics, government, and the collapse of dictatorship was influenced by global revolutions. Being politicized, people in general and ethnic groups in particular, demanded more authorization and liberty from the central government.

Political and autonomous actions of ethnic groups during the recent century were mainly coincided with transitional periods and political detachments such as the Collapse of the Mashrute Revolution and occupation of Iran by allied forces in World War I (separatist movements in Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Baloochestan, and Khuzestan).

2. Mashrute Revolution resulted in the establishment of Parliament in Iran in 1906.

And Collapse of the Pahlavi dictatorial regime (political crisis in Kurdistan, Baloochestan, Turkmen Sahra, and Khuzestan).

The relationship of the central and marginal parts is marked by a kind of opposition between them. The stance of the central part towards the marginal part was centralism, controlling, and anti-regionalism, while the attitude of the marginal part was regionalism and anti-centralism.

In spite of the inclination of the marginal part towards anti-centralism and autonomy, they considered themselves as a part of the political geography of Iran. Therefore, understanding tribal feelings, change of attitude of the central part towards the marginal part, releasing regionalism potential through distributing political power, national management of the whole geographical regions of Iran in Moderate and equal framework of fair distribution of national wealth, to some extent, can have contributions in creating national understanding, unity, trust of each other among the various component parts of the nations, and enhancing the national spirit of intimacy. This study leads to conclusion that, Turkmen minority is different from the majority of Iranian nation, from view point of history, culture, religion and social communication which is generally based on nomadism.

Being in the neighborhood of Turkmenistan and the Caspian Sea will bring a good chance to the government to improve the conditions of the Turkmen so that they could have more share in national and regional development.

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