



Article Type: Research paper

Environmental security and regional cooperation in the Persian Gulf

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Article Info.

Received: 26/01/2024

Accepted: 07/30/2024

Available Online: 05/09/2024

Abstract

Environmental crises and problems have posed unprecedented primary and secondary threats to humanity, putting environmental concerns and saving the biosphere at the center of world politics. Climate change and its consequences such as floods and droughts that threaten the survival of millions of people, animals and plants, problems with air pollution and the resulting increase in mortality rates, the increasing pollution of the seas and oceans and the alteration of marine ecosystems through the dumping of pollutants, sewage and fuel spills; the overuse of fossil fuels and the emission of greenhouse gases, soil erosion and ecosystem degradation, deforestation and desertification, biodiversity loss, destruction of natural habitats, illegal hunting and its consequences such as the spread of pandemic diseases common to humans and animals - this is just a small part of the environmental crises facing people in the

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How to Site:

Sarvestani, Abbas & Safavi, Seyed Hamzeh. (2024). Environmental security and Persian Gulf regional cooperation. *The Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 6(2), 19-22.



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21st century. The growing trend of environmental threats and their destructive and devastating effects on health, the economy, security and global geopolitics, the worsening of unemployment and the increase in economic inequalities and the resulting challenges in the domestic politics of countries, such as the rise of populism, the rise of right-wing and authoritarian governments, the undermining of free trade, the increase in regional conflicts over water and energy resources, the increase in forced migration, the emergence of a migrant and refugee crisis and the risk of them becoming scapegoats, the increase in violence, organized crime and the threat of terrorism and fundamentalism, which are both a consequence of environmental crises and a cause of many of these crises, have changed the traditional understanding of the concepts of peace and security, which were very military, deterrent, limited and associated with a zero-sum game. It has created a new and comprehensive concept of security that encompasses not only all military and political components, but also economic, social and environmental ones. This comprehensive and broad concept of security has shifted the responsibility for ensuring security to a vast network of transnational, multilateral and multi-level global governance, given the inability of nation states to counter new threats and ensure the security of their citizens.

This article defines the meaning and concept of environmental security and examines the implications of this new concept for global politics and international relations, as well as its potential for regional cooperation in the Persian Gulf. The main question of this research is: How has the rise and expansion of transnational environmental threats affected regional cooperation in the Persian Gulf? The hypothesis tested to answer this question is that the increase and expansion of non-traditional and borderless threats will inevitably drive the Persian Gulf littoral states to cooperate.

In terms of analyzing regional cooperation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in the field of environmental protection, this article argues that these policies and cooperative efforts are consistent with at least two main assumptions of multilevel governance theory. The study of GCC countries' cooperation under this theory has provided data that has informed theoretical studies in this area and supported the assumptions of multilevel governance theory. The first assumption concerns the changing role of states. In the face of widespread primary and secondary environmental threats on a global scale, nation states are no longer able to ensure the security of their citizens. This has driven them towards transnational and subnational cooperation in combating environmental threats. Second, because environmental issues are the domain of low politics, member states are more willing to give up their national sov-

ereignty in favor of transnational action in this area than in other areas. This has led to the formation of a complex network of actors, instruments and policy-making centers in the environmental field.

In general, the concept of the environment - whether in its positive aspect, i.e. the provision of strategic natural resources, or in its negative aspect, i.e. the imposition of geopolitical constraints on countries — has always been part of the security structure of international relations. In international relations theories, however, it has always been considered an abstract issue within the state-centered concept of security. Traditional international relations theories have often overlooked the issue of environmental insecurity as part of the international relations discourse when developing the state-centered concept of security. In recent years, environmental issues have taken a prominent place on the international policy agenda due to their impact on security and economic areas of greatest concern to states. The proliferation of concepts such as water wars, drug wars, diamond wars, oil wars, climate change, deforestation or pollution in international relations and their connection to national security have made environmental security one of the most controversial concepts in the discourse of international relations. This broad understanding of security as opposed to the narrow and traditional understanding, the emergence of the concept of environmental security, the development of shared environmental values in the context of globalization and the rise of green theories in international relations have increasingly challenged the traditional theories of international relations and established the environment as a subfield of theoretical studies in international relations. The result of this environmental awareness has been the conceptualization of global governance both as a tool and framework for understanding emerging environmental issues and as a comprehensive mechanism for cooperation between nation states to address these widespread threats.

Global governance, through the coordination of different actors and the establishment of rules, policies, regulations, standards and procedures, has been instrumental in placing environmental issues on the global agenda and expanding environmental cooperation at global, regional and local levels. Given the importance of the Persian Gulf region to global environmental governance, both in terms of energy security and fossil fuel production as a major contributor to climate change, as well as the region's fragility, vulnerability and high sensitivity to the environmental impacts of global climate change, and the inability of national governments in the Gulf region to address widespread environmental threats, global governance has created a mechanism and extensive interactive network for decision-making and addressing many global issues and problems.

By promoting transnational identity, detaching politics from national contexts, creating a functional rather than a territorial political space, strengthening interdependence in decision-making at different levels, and developing global paradigms such as sustainable development or common but differentiated responsibilities, global governance has played a crucial role in rescuing the Gulf region from the spiral of widespread environmental problems and threats. There are different levels of multilateral cooperation to address the multilateral security challenges currently facing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. At the regional level, the evolving security challenges may push local actors towards the idea of a long-term, indigenous and endogenous security system. In addition, closer economic, social and environmental cooperation can mitigate the perceived challenges to political and military security. In this context, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders have often cited European peace building as a model with important lessons for regional cooperation in the Gulf. These lessons can be categorized into three areas: Identity building and branding based on Islamic values to deconstruct and undermine nationalism and national and ethnic identities, environmental security based on human security at the regional level, and transnational cooperation within the framework of global environmental conventions.

Key words: environmental security, global environmental governance, regional cooperation, Persian Gulf.