

PRINTING CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST (POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIC REVIEW)

Manvender Kaur Sarjit Singh

Xiamen University Malaysia

Email: manvender1@gmail.com

Abstract

Middle East is a region with geographical irony. With strong geographical elements and having both physical and non-physical diverse potentials, this region should be politically powerful. In fact, Middle East seems like "a hostage held region," where its strategic and potential geographical conditions have triggered the presence of foreign forces in the region with various political and economical interests from time to time. The presence of Persian Empire, which later on followed by Ottoman Turkey to the era of France Political Forces of Napoleon, all tried to rule the region. Likewise, during the First and the Second World War, this area was significantly strategic because it played a role in the victory of allied countries, as a military base and logistic track. The region became more significant when oil fields were discovered in the 1940s. This had invited more foreign forces to come particularly the United States and the European countries. Conflict of interests of world power in the Middle East continues to put its hegemony until the present days. Various foreign interests in the region, more or less, initiated conflicts in the politics of the region, particularly creating dilemma in the integration of all Arab countries.

KeyWords: Middle East, Geographical Irony, Conflict, Politics, Arab Countries, World Power

A. INTRODUCTION

With all its complexity, the Middle East is not easily understood comprehensively by analysts and foreign observers. To define the term "Middle East" or formerly often called "the Near East" there is still no agreement about which countries are included in the region this. Even among international political experts (diplomats and mass media) there is no similarity regarding the definition of "Middle East", also regarding which nations, countries and regions can be included in the "Middle East" region. Apart from the debate over the definition of the existence of the Middle East region, the author refers to the definition most commonly used by referring to an area that stretches from Libya at the west end to Iran at the east end and from Turkey at the north end to the Arabian Peninsula at the south end. The mention of the Middle East according to Kasijanto Sastrodinomo is indeed not just a geographical term, but rather as a geopolitical concept constructed by the West and its allies. The term Middle East first appeared since World War II by Alfred Thayer Mahan, a US naval strategist to name an area east of the desert of the former Ottoman Empire which, if seen from Europe not far away. After Middle East II began to be known as conflict-filled territory. George Lenczowski in "The Middle East in World Affairs" described the political life in the Middle East region as "conspiracy" between

a number of Western countries and local political forces. In other words the Middle East can also be said as a term that was born from the results of the plot. The Middle East is an area that has always been a concern of humankind from time to time, so much history is engraved in this region, from the history of the golden age of culture that stretches in the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris rivers, to the emergence of political shock from Iran with the birth of Islamic power able to change the shape of the kingdom into an Islamic republic, until the bloodshed in various domestic, regional and international political interests in several conflict situations; ArabIsrael War, US-Iraq invasion to "Arab spring" political revolutions in several countries in the last two years.

Not only that a few centuries before the Middle East had given birth to a number of "miracles" as well as making this region as a spiritual mecca with the birth of the world's major religions whose influence was felt by hundreds of millions of human beings to date. But on the other hand this region also gave birth to the "mecca" of competition and conflicts of interests between intra-regional and Western countries after the discovery of oil content in the barren and sandy underground around the 1930s. Instantly the Middle East is seen as a "new and strategic force" that is beginning to be discussed, not only in the context of global practical politics, but also its dynamics are increasingly interesting to study and study. Geographically, the Middle East gave birth to an ironic reality, the strategic location of the region and all its wonders should make this region more stable, but instead the region is known as a "hot region" with various conflicts of interest. From these conditions the authors are interested in analyzing the existence of this region to the dynamics of the conflict that occurs in it using the perspective of political geography.

B.DISCUSSION

Political Geography

The term political geography emerged in the late 19th century, by a German biologist named Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). However according to Blake and Drysdale the roots of political geography have existed since Ancient Greece through Aristotle's thought, also studied by Arab historian IbnKhaldun and philosophers French Montesquieu. The three thinkers explicitly consider geographical factors in their works about the state. But lately Ratzel's work is considered more focused on studying the study of political geography in his 1897 work entitled *politischegeographie* which later led him to be dubbed a "father of political geography". Ratzel defines political geography, namely the study of the state as a space organism. The state is described as an organism that is attached to the earth, whose fate is determined by two main variables, namely: Raum (space) and Lage (position). As a scientist who was also influenced by the way of thinking of Charles Darwin, Ratzel saw the state as an organism that had to compete with other organisms,

and in order to develop the "organism" it needed *labensraum* (space to live). In other words, Ratzel with this biological model wants to show that each country has different needs depending on the physical conditions of the existence of each country. And one of the fundamental requirements is the survival of the population.

Ratzel's thoughts in developing political geography studies were continued by Rudolf Kjellen from the University of Gothenburg, according to Kjellen "to obtain living space needs to be expanded", even though it should lead to war. This study also led to studies of inter-state relations and the implications of this relationship for the international arena as a whole. This is reinforced by the new definition of political geography put forward by Jack Plano and Roy Olton in the International Relations Dictionary, which is a study that examines a country's political policies and foreign policy conducted on the basis of geographical considerations. Another definition arises from the results of the decision of geo-political experts at the 1983 International Geographic Union, by agreeing on the definition of political geography as follows: "fuller understanding of the political problems of territory, the oceans and human resources. Thus the understanding of the state as a territorial phenomenon requires the study of characteristics not only in the physical political space such as territory, natural resources, population but also in non-physical characteristics such as ethnic and cultural elements. According to Mohtar Masooed ethnic and cultural elements are important to note because these elements provide validity to the existence of the nation-state, in other words also a pre-requisite for geopolitical analysis.

Furthermore, in the development of this study, modern political geographers develop and refine previous concepts of political geography to explain patterns of relations between countries. There are at least four theories put forward by several political geographers in this paper. First, Heartland Theory, this theory was introduced by Sir Halford Mackinder (1869-1947), a British national military strategist. In his work "the geographic pivot of history", Mackinder tries to interpret world history based on geopolitical thinking, where the center of land power is the most important in the world, as well as the most powerful fortress in the world. The very representative land power center was seen initially located in the heartland of Germany (Eastern Europe) which later became known as the heartland. Further development, the vast land area in Asia, especially in Siberia, Russia, was later viewed by geopolitics Jeman Karl Haushoffer as a a new land force that will perfect the power of heartland. Correspondingly, Haushoffer "encouraged" Germany to form a joint bloc of land forces in Asia (the Soviet Union). The combination of the two forces based on the vast and unblocked land force was known as the "Eurasia" of the merging of Europe and Asia, which Mackinder later called "world island". Thus the core thinking of Mackinder can be summed up as follows: who controls East Europe command the Heartland, who controls the heartland command world island, who commands the world island command the world ".

Second, Sea Power Theory of sea power as the basis of geopolitical theory was first introduced by Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), a US naval strategist. This theory emphasizes that maritime power is the key to becoming a world power. A scientific analysis of history, where the British navy is able to explain the great power of the British Nation as a world power. In his view, AT. Mahan argues that samude

Geography of Middle Eastern Politics

Strategically, the Middle East has always been the most important region, so whoever controls it will have a strategic position in the world, its geopolitical uniqueness and geostrategy are recognized by large countries. This came to the fore after World War II, the global situation at that time was marked by the political and economic dominance of major industrial countries and the struggle for influence between the United States and the Soviet Union. And the Middle East region emerged as a new power as well as an important "object" that began to be taken into account in the world political constellation. In terms of political geography there are a number of reasons why this region is so important:

A). Strategic location

Strategic geographical location has its own advantages for a country / region. This is because the physical geographic location is very influential on national strength. In general, an area is considered strategic if it is located in a strategic position as well, including being traversed by trade traffic, both land and sea. The Middle East region is seen as very strategic, for at least two reasons;

a. The region on three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe, automatically links these three continents and is important for global economic, trade and defense strategies.

b. Countries in the Middle East region are bordered by several seas, straits, which are very strategically located;

1. Mediterranean (Mediterranean) is located along the border of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia. This sea separates mainland Africa and Europe.

2. The Red Sea is located between Africa and Arabia, precisely on the border of Saudi Arabia and Sudan

3. Arabian Sea, located in the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean between Arabia and India

4. Dead Sea, located on the border of Jordan and Israel

5. Caspian Sea, which borders Iran.

6. Black Sea, found in Turkey

7. Aegean Sea, located on the border of Turkey and Greece.

Besides having important seas, this area also has strategic straits and is very important for trade routes (especially oil).

1. Gibraltar Strait

This strait becomes a separator between North Africa and Europe, precisely located between Morocco and Spain. This is one of the busiest straits in the world because it is a short road trip for ships from the Atlantic Ocean (European America) to Asia.

2. Strait of Bab-Al Mandap

This strait is located at the end of the Red Sea precisely on the coast of Yemen. This cross is important because all ships that take the Suez Canal the Red Sea - Indian Ocean are almost certain to pass through this strait. Soviet), by mastering Bab-Al Mandap it will be able to exert a great influence on the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula region.

3. Turkish Strait

This strait becomes important because it is a transit point (trade) from the Atlantic Ocean to Asia. As well as the only Russian trade route from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This is likely one of the main considerations of NATO to include Turkey as one of its members. During the Cold War, this strait became very important for the Soviet Union, due to the cold season of the US seas frozen. This became known as the "warm water politics" of the Soviet Union. And for the US, the Turkish Strait was once a base / place to control the activities and strength of the US during the Cold War.

4. Strait of Hormuz

This strait is located in northern Iran and Oman in the south. Traffic in these waters, although narrow (6.4 kilometers wide), is very heavy due to several features, namely; all ships or transportation of oil to and from the Persian Gulf - Arabian Sea - Indian Ocean are confirmed through this strait

Mapping Political Geography Conflict in the Middle East

The geographical features of the Middle East on one side do indeed benefit the region, but on the other hand it causes problems / conflicts. Following is the mapping of several conflicts in the Middle East caused by geographical factors;

a. Boundary Dispute

Regional borders are a symbol of national sovereignty and power. The border is like human skin, where the border of a country serves to protect the security of the country's territory, its inhabitants, its natural resources, also serves to maintain good relations with neighbors, good fence makes good neighbor. But in the Middle East, the border problem creates various border conflicts, which are caused by at least three things.

First, the role of imperialism, for example in 1916 through the Sykes-Picot agreement The British and French governments divided up the former Ottoman empire (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan). Where the British get the rights to Iraq, Jordan, while France gets the rights to Syria and Lebanon. Also in 1917 through the Balfour Declaration, Britain granted Israel territories in Palestine to create a prolonged conflict to this day. Secondly, it is difficult to determine the borders of the mainland due to the natural conditions of sandy lands, and also the difficulty of determining the land borders which then reach the coast such as those of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia and the Algerian-Moroccan conflict over Western Sahara, as well as Iraq and Iran in fighting over the Shattal-Arab. Third, border conflicts due to the presence of natural resources (oil, minerals, water) at the border (land, river, sea). Problems that often arise with regard to who has the right to manage the allocation of water or natural resources that may be contained by rivers. For example: Conflict in Saudi Arabia and Sudan over the management of natural resources contained in the Red Sea. Likewise the conflict in Egypt, Sudan, and Uganda in the fight over the debit of the Nile profits. Another example: The city of Kirkuk which is rich in oil content, then triggers a prolonged conflict between the Iraqi Government and the Kurds who want independence and get support from the US for independence.

b. Water problem

Water is one of the vital sources of human life, so it is not surprising that there are conflicts caused by water, and not a few conflicts that occur in the Middle East region caused by water.

The following factors cause it;

1. Limitations of fresh water

The problem of fresh water as the main commodity to fulfill daily needs is very limited in this region. While the need for water is increasing from year to year due to increasing population, and increasing agricultural production. Boutros Boutros Ghali once predicted that water would become a more valuable commodity than oil, and subsequent Middle Eastern countries would fight for water. So there are fears that some time in the future Arab countries will spend part of their oil revenues to buy water. Saudi Arabia, for example, to meet the needs of its people for fresh water, it is automatically supported by the country's large financial capacity. So it does not rule out the possibility that water will be more valuable than oil.

2. Rivers run through several countries

In the Middle East which consists of approximately 20 countries, it turns out that only has 4 large rivers as a source of life for its people, namely the Nile River, Jordan River, Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. The problem is amid limited fresh water resources, these rivers flow through many countries. So it is not uncommon for conflicts to occur because some countries build dams and reservoirs in their territories resulting in reduced river flow / water discharge to other countries. Such as Turkey which built the Attaturk dam triggered the Turkish-Iraqi-Iran-Syrian conflict over the utilization of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Likewise Syria, in 1975 built the Al-Thawra dam whose water discharge was accommodated in Al-Asaad Lake. Syriani's action caused his political relations with Iraq to be strained, because the water discharge of the two rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) automatically decreased in Iraq and this condition certainly threatened the lives of the Iraqi people for their need for fresh water, especially the agricultural sector. Another case is the conflict of struggle between Iraq and Iran over the ownership of Shattal-Arab, where the meeting of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers along the 80 km shown in the picture below is a vital area for both parties as access / oil route to the Gulf. River flow conflicts also occur over rivers Jordan which is a river that is vital for Jordan and Israel. Israel's dependence on this river has made returning to occupied Palestinian Arabs very impossible. Some literature states that Israel's dependence on the river reaches 50 percent. This river empties into the Golan Heights where Israel has also invested heavily in its agricultural development. Besides that, Jordan is also very dependent on the flow of this river because of its vital access to the Mediterranean. For this reason, there is no alternative for Jordan to negotiate peacefully with Israel to reach an agreement on river water allocation.

Oil Problems

The oil factor has always been a central issue and has always received "accusations" as the main trigger for conflict in the Middle East, especially in parts of West Asia, both regional internal conflicts and international scale conflicts involving foreign parties (Western) with an interest in the region. Following are some of the factors causing oil conflicts in this region:

- 1) There are foreign interests, such as the US and its allies to control oil-rich regions. This is the reason for the US attack on Iraq in March 2003, after the accusation of the ownership of the Contract for weapons of mass destruction was not proven. Furthermore, it is very illustrated in US support for Kurdish independence demands from Iraq, as well as the involvement of NATO forces in the overthrow of President Gaddafi in Libya, allegedly because of political economic interests because Libya is the largest oil producer in Africa.
- 2) Oil has always caused anxiety, especially in the Iraqi community because the commodity is the only force that Iraq has to meet the needs of its people, and also

becomes a bargain in the international world. If there is a crisis in the oil sector, no other commodity can be relied on by Iraq.

3) There are striking differences between countries that have abundant oil and countries that have less oil. Among the Arab countries there are some countries that are relatively rich because they produce a lot of oil. This condition tends to influence the country's foreign policy, especially towards the West. This is also what has hindered the Arab unity movement. For example: The foreign policy of oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and the emirate countries in the Gulf of Persia (Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Oman) tend to be pro-western - this is different from other countries such as Syria, Algeria, Libya, Egypt (for some time) which has less oil resources than countries in the bay.

3. Oil concentrations are generally located in areas that have the potential for conflict; for example, the city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq is home to the largest Iraqi oil reserves, where the area is a base of Kurdish tribes who are enemies of the Iraqi government and are fighting for independence from Iraq.

Iraq-Iran War

Iraq's hostility with Iran concerns complex and interrelated issues, starting with ethnic differences, namely on the part of Iraq and Persia on the part of Iran, dynastic rivalries in the past between Umayyads and Abbasids or between the Ottomans who controlled Iraq with the Persians in Iran, also the upheaval between Shiites and Sunnis, or because of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. In relation to geographical conditions, Iraq has a direct border with Iran at the end of the bay called Shatt al-Arab as shown below, Iran insists on defending the region after the discovery of oil resources in Abadan. But in 1975, Iran-Iraq agreed to sign the Algiers Treaty which divided Shatt al-Arab for Iraqi and Iranian shipping, in return Iran would not incite or assist Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. However, this agreement was later revoked unilaterally by Iraq because of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. As a result, this neighboring country was involved in a war for 8 years (1980-1988). At that time, Iran destroyed Iraqi oil fields in Fao, Khor al-Amayah and Khor al-Bakr, as well as oil refineries in Basra which could produce 140,000 barrels per day.

Iraq-Kuwait War

Between 1990-1991, Iraq was involved in a gulf crisis which then broke out into an open conflict with its neighbor Kuwait. On 2 August 1990 Iraq launched its invasion of Kuwait. The trigger for the Iraq-Kuwait war was economic (oil) problems, before Baghdad accused Kuwait of "robbing" Iraqi oil resources (in the disputed Ramallah region of Iraq and Kuwait), worth 2.4 billion US dollars. Another accusation is that Kuwait and the Arab Union (UAE) have "hit Iraq from behind", they succeeded in flooding world oil which resulted in losses on the side of Baghdad worth 14 billion US dollars, due to violations of the OPEC quota by Kuwait and the UAE, the oil price had

indeed had a chance plummeted to 15 dollars a barrel.²³ Leads that relied on oil as their main commodity were briefly hit by a drop in oil prices on the international market. Moreover, Baghdad was actively pushing for economic and military development due to an eight-year war with Iran that resulted in the destruction of Iraq's social economic infrastructure. By trying to exclude Kuwait Iraqi President Saddam Hussein hopes to cut corners to restore the country's economy. For Iraq, oil is a two-sided currency, which concerns the country's strengths as well as its weaknesses. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia, it is estimated that Iraq's oil reserves are 112.5 billion barrels or 10.7% of world oil reserves, while its pre-war production capacity with Kuwait is 3.5 million barrels per day. Compare this with Indonesia's oil reserves which are only 10 billion barrels, producing 1.3 million barrels per day. While the weakness lies in the geographical condition of this country which is a "land locked country" so that this country faces difficulties when it comes to exporting its oil, especially by sea. The geographical situation is the second justification for Iraq to annex its neighbor Kuwait, thus the coast becomes longer and sea access is wider, including the existence of two islands, namely Kabar and Bubiyan, and at the same time can be annexed. This situation also does not necessarily provide a big advantage for Iraq in developing its oil production, because Iraq will always face several obstacles in this regard.

Oil Issues in the US-Iraq Conflict

The US began to pay attention to oil in the Middle East more or less half a century ago, when the US Congress held a special session to issue a decision on the amount of oil the US must import each month. US attention to oil in the Middle East was heightened after the Arab oil boycott following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. President Jimmy Carter (1976-1980), had set Carter's principle that requires the US to secure by all means of its oil supply. This principle emphasizes that if a threat arises, it must use all means, including military force, to ensure the continued supply of oil. Almost every year the US imports 53% of its total oil needs, and imports are expected to continue to increase in the coming years, while the US need for oil to move its economy into something absolute. And Iraq is a target for the US, since the beginning of the "miracle" of Iraqi oil has attracted the interest of large countries, especially Britain and America, to control this region. One example; Iraqi dependence will Kirkuk and Mosul (two oil-source cities) used by the United States to seek support by inciting Kurds to break away immediately from Iraq. It seems that American support for the Kurds is more for reasons for oil concessions in the Kurdish region, especially Kirkuk, to fall into the hands of American companies, such as Halliburton, Kellogg Brown and Root, MCI World Com, etc. (some of these companies have signed billions of dollars in contracts for Iraqi development). Egyptian political and strategy analyst TahaMajdub in an article in the Al-Ahram newspaper May 12, 2002 said: "the implicit objective of the threat of the US attack on Iraq is Washington's desire to control oil in the bay and Iraq". Likewise he likened the strategic objectives of the US attack to

Afghanistan some time ago. According to him, the purpose of the US onslaught on Afghanistan to subvert the power of the Taliban and eradicate the Al-Qaeda network was only a trick of the United States, which implied behind it was to control the Central Asian region and the oil-rich Caspian Sea and place its influence there. Likewise, the US attack on Iraq, which they convinced to eradicate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein's undemocratic government, but what was implied behind that was to control Iraqi oil.

Still according to Mahdjub, if the US fully controls the Iraqi and Ku oil wells wait (the amount will beat Saudi Arabian oil), then Washington will be in a stronger position in dealing with other Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, and in turn can dictate these Arab countries without fear of being interrupted by the flow of oil supplies from the Middle East. It is very clear that the US attack on Iraq on the grounds of possession of a weapon of mass destruction is a lie. During this time Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Husein who was very anti-American, and received strong support from most of his people turned out to make it difficult for America to get oil concessions in the country.

C.CONCLUSION

From the description above, it can be concluded that the Middle East region that has never been separated from political problems at the domestic, regional or international scale, more precisely is always full and political surprises are born. The potential geographical conditions are in reality not directly proportional to the political comfort in this region starting from first. Even the tug-of-war between the world powers in the Middle East continues to establish its hegemony until now. Geographical strength which should be used as a regional political force is in fact the realignment of the region's hostage, its significance and strategic geographical conditions actually trigger various major problems. which automatically has a direct impact on the existence of regional countries and quite influences the difficulty of these regional countries, particularly Arab countries, to realize integration. Along with the development of political geography discourse, there are things that need to be reconstructed, the political geography of a country / region is no longer merely in terms of strategic location and potential natural resource conditions, it will become a boomerang if it is not accompanied by the development of a strong state / nation character . Bearing this in mind, this is sometimes ruled out, so that the geographic power possessed is easily exploited by other countries. The development of the nation's character must be continuously managed and developed including the spirit of patriotism, not betraying the nation itself, leaders with integrity, tolerance and democracy, and have a vision to build mutual prosperity. The development of this character should be the foundation for the development of concepts of political geography in the future.

D. REFERENCES

1. Drysdale Alasdair and Gerald Blake, *The Middle East and North Africa a Political*
2. *Geography*, New York; Oxford Press; 1985
3. Daldjoeni, *Fundamentals of Political Geography*, Bandung; Citra Aditya Bhakti; 1991
4. Dam, Syamsumar, *Maritime Politics*, Jakarta: Earth Literacy; 2010
5. Hayati Sri & Ahmad Yani, *Political Geography*, Bandung; RefikaAditama; 2007
6. Leoczowski, George, *The Middle East In The World Affair*; New York; 1962
7. Moris, Marry E, *Water and Conflict in the Middle East: Threats and Opportunities*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Jan-Mar 1997, Vol. 20 Issue 1
8. Muti'ahSetyawati, Siti, *Hydropolitics in the Middle East*, Research Results, UGM International Relations Department, 1998,
9. _____, *Iraq Under American Power*, Yogyakarta; PPMTT Department of HI, UGM Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in collaboration with the Foreign Affairs Assessment and Development Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004
10. Mas'oed, Mohtar, *Development of Geopolitical Thought; From War Science to Peace Science*, Political Geography lectures in the Political Science Study Program, Post-Graduate UGM
11. Nolte, Richard H. *The Modern Middle East*, New York; 1963
12. Plano, Jack C. and Roy Olton, *International Relations Dictionary*; Terj, Bandung, Abardin, 1990
13. Rahman, Mustafa Abdul Geliat *Iraq Towards the Post-Saddam Era*, Jakarta; Publisher
14. Kompas Media Nusantara, 2003
15. Sihbudi, Riza, *Middle East Hostage*, Bandung; Mizan; 2007
16. SihbuRiza, Bara in the Middle East, Bandung; Mizan Publisher; 1991
17. Tempo Magazine, January 3, 2011