CHAPTER 13

Ali Shariati and Anti-Americanism in the Persian Gulf Region

Fatemeh Shayan

Introduction

In this chapter, Shariati’s viewpoints on the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its adopted Islamic identity are examined, as it is posited that these phenomena encouraged anti-American sentiment by highlighting the threat of the United States to Islamic identity. In addition, this analysis of Shariati’s views is extended to the wider Persian Gulf region, by which I examine anti-American sentiment between 2000 and 2011. More than a century ago, Bismarck declared the Persian Gulf to be a region he hoped God would never allow him to fall victim to. However, in the last three decades, security of the Persian Gulf region has been influenced by American geopolitical strategies and the American military presence. Issues such as the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and the War in Iraq beginning in 2003, have resulted in an unprecedented American presence in the region, which has led to the rise of anti-American sentiments across the entire region.

In examining the issue of anti-Americanism in the Persian Gulf, authors of various studies have mainly focused on the way in which the regional states exercise power in response to the American presence in the region. Concerning anti-American sentiments, in 2002, Barry Rubin examined rising anti-American sentiments as a means for members of the ruling elites to distract the people in the Persian Gulf. Following the Iraq War, according to Wesley,

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1 This time period was chosen due to the effects of globalization, which have become more apparent in the Persian Gulf since 2000. The 2003 US War in Iraq brought again the US policy into the forefront of attention in the region, which is still influential, despite the US army withdrawal from Iraq in 2011.
the unilateral American policy resulted in the exacerbation of anti-American sentiments. Wesley further noted that unilateral American policies had led to an overreach, while arrogantly ignoring the rest of the world, where a series of reactions ranging from terrorism to anti-American viewpoints have emerged. Although these have been the subject of extensive analyses on anti-American perspectives, at a general level, the viewpoints of Ali Shariati on anti-Americanism in Iran and their connection to the developments in the wider Persian Gulf region have remained largely unexplored.

At the same time, it is important to note Lynch's analysis of Arab politics and their anti-American viewpoints. The authors explain that, following the events that took place between 1999 and 2004, American presence in the Arab world has increased, resulting in the Arab states politically aligning themselves against American policies toward Iraq. Thus, Lynch suggests that anti-Americanism has become a unifying force for the Arab states, whereby satellite television and other mass media are utilized to disseminate their viewpoints. Lynch's perspective, however, is broad and does not extend to the examination of the phenomenon that specifically pertains to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. According to Lynch's analysis, the Arab states in the Middle East allegedly exercise power vis-à-vis the United States. These broad generalizations are made, even though Lynch limits anti-American sentiments to the viewpoints of the regional states, while excluding the perspectives of other actors. Accordingly, his examination is insufficient when exploring the relationship of power in the context of anti-Americanism in the Persian Gulf post-Iraq War, where the transnational actors of al-Qaeda and the regional public are involved in the process of forming anti-American sentiments.

To provide a new perspective, the work presented in this chapter aims to answer the question: How is Shariati's viewpoint on anti-Americanism interrelated with the rise of anti-American sentiments in the Persian Gulf? To gain such an understanding, two phenomena, globalization and American policies in the region, are examined. To analyse them, I will utilize the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, while specifically drawing upon its constructivist aspect. Taking the constructivist perspective allows, for example, us to discern how globalization and American policies in the region are securitized by regional states, which has led to anti-Americanism. I will limit my examination to the period between 2000 and 2011.

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