



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE WAR CRISIS OF THE MIDDLE EAST IN PERSPECTIVE OF POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

In the Middle East from Palestine to Syria, Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the situation is not normal. Iraq is involved with ISIL. Syria has been caught in a civil war. Libya, despite Gaddafi's withdrawal, has yet to stabilize. Although Turkey has had good economic growth in recent years, the issue of ethnic minority groups remains unresolved. In Pakistan, Imran Khan and Tahir al-Qadiri are against the government and demand the resignation of the prime minister. The situation of tomorrow afghan is obscure, as in other Middle Eastern countries, because the Middle Eastern countries have been plagued with such a sting. What factors have pushed these countries into the current situation?

Key words: Crisis, Middle East, Strategy, Political Geography.

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INTRODUCTION

The "Middle East" is a term that Europeans call the region because of its geographical location, while the region is almost at the center of the earth's lands and the political map of the world, and not in the central East or the Middle East. The Middle East, geographically and truly, should be located at the middle of Asia, not in west Asia with Egypt added to it (Badiy, Rabi, 1984). The term Middle East indicates a cultural region, so there is no clear cut boundaries for it. Generally, the countries of this region include Jordan, Quds Occupying Regime, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Bahrain, Turkey, Palestinian National Authority, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, and Yemen. The current study aimed at investigating the causes and factors of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East by examining what is going on, especially in the Persian Gulf region.

Quds Occupying Regime

The Israel view on the new security environment of the Middle East after the fall of Saddam Husain, has been always a threatening one, and based on this view, the Tel Aviv authorities have tried to control the turmoil entries to their security system outside their boundaries, and prevent it from getting inside. In Israeli authorities point of view, the access of the regions countries to unconventional weaponry and more

importantly, the issue of uncertainty of the Middle East peace talks, especially after death of Yasser Arafat, and in addition to it, the serious vulnerability of this state against other countries of the region, can make serious security-political challenges for them. In this regard, Israel has built its strategy on the basis of expanding its influence, so that today its strategic range, in the form the new Middle East, is extended to the Black Sea in the north, the Gulf of Aden in the south, the Strait of Gibraltar in the West and Central Asia and the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. On the other hand, occupation of Iraq and fall of Saddam provided Israel with opportunity to fulfill its dreams as much as its capabilities let it. What are the Israel opportunities in the Middle East will be elaborated in the next lines. However, what is latent in the plans and strategies is the True Israeli identity which has repeatedly been called upon by Israeli authorities as the "Great Israel" (<http://www.iran.ir>, 15 April 2003). The highly important point about Israel is the presence of this regime in the cultural, economic, and political system of the Middle East, an issue that has involved many statesmen and leaders in the Middle East. Generally, there are two approaches towards the future state of Israel in the Middle East:

First, it will turn its military superiority into political and economic hegemony. According to this scenario, Israel, that has enjoyed the military superiority so far (in terms of conventional and nuclear weapons) would try to benefit from the effective use of power in the Middle East for securing its regional dominance. Second, Israel may act as the superior state in the region according to which scenario, it would play the role of an axis in a system of economic, defensive, and

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communicational networks between the Middle East and the West. In both cases, the integration of Israel within the Middle East system will bring about major changes in the regional situation and the traditional role of this regime in the system. The important point is that the economic, political, and strategic participation of Israel in the region affairs does not necessarily mean the cultural convergence. Both the citizens and the neighbors of Israel look upon this regime as a part of western civilization. Therefore, all the regional efforts would definitely be consistent with the economic and political benefits rather than cultural and ideological similarities (Al-Assad Durand).

United Arab Emirates

The UAE, from the beginning of 2014, has tried to play more roles in the regional developments. A presence that has been coincided with the decline of Qatar, and now it is trying to be present everywhere. With the Islamic Revolution flared up in the region, some countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Turkey, sought their own interests from inside the crisis-hit countries. Many writings have focused on the analysis and the type of these countries' behaviors beyond the regional development after the rise of the ISIS Takfiris, however the behavior of the UAE and its movements has been less addressed. This small emirate country, especially after the formation of the Western coalition against the extremists in the Middle East, has tried to play a more important role in the so-called fight against the ISIS. The UAE, mainly after the failure of Qatar to play the former important role in the region, has been more manifested in some countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The presence in Egypt in the form of severe opposition to Muslim Brotherhood Party, at the time of the first presidential election and the rivalry between Ahmed Shafiq and Mohammed Morsi, in which the Emirates tried hard to get Shafiq elected, and after the removal of Morsi, it used all its efforts to isolate the Brotherhood in Egypt, is among these manifestations.

Intervention in Libya: the Emirates must be present whenever the name of the struggle against the Muslim Brotherhood comes up. Saudi Arabia and UAE tried to prevent Turkey and Qatar from penetrating Libya since the fall of Gaddafi. Therefore, after the fall of Gaddafi, Libya practically became the competition ground of Emirates/Saudi Arabia and Turkey/Qatar. Ankara and Doha tried to bring the Islamist groups including Muslim Brotherhood into power. The zenith of UAE's presence and intervention in Libya was the air strike on Tripoli airport. Supporting the ISIS Terrorists: the UAE is among the countries accused of supporting the ISIS Takfiris. Barack Obama's Vice President Joe Biden, in an unprecedented critique of the policies of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has explicitly introduced them as the terrorist supporters in the region, on 7th of the last October, helping the groups such as al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra and takfiri groups by hundreds of millions of dollars for the sake of the overthrowing Bashar al-Assad. Besides the active participation in the scenes mentioned before, the UAE is also trying to be effective in Yemen. However, since the Saudi Arabia is more interested than any other country in Yemen, the Emirates tries to be more of a Saudi-supporter in this scene than to make it single-handedly. Indeed, there are rumors Abu Dhabi is trying to bring Ahmed Abdollah Saleh, the son of Ali Abdollah Saleh, who is currently Yemen's ambassador in Emirates, into power.

Qatar

Qatar is a small state in the Middle East, however it plays an important role in the region, as its effectiveness and role in the democratic uprisings and new developments in the Arab world are manifested. This small country has appeared to basically and seriously affect democratic uprisings and Arab World developments, and tried to be highly effective in all areas of crisis and transformation, and be an active and significant player alongside the main regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Turkey. Specific components have been effective in all behaviors of Qatar towards Arabic developments and uprisings of the region, however it can be seen that there are distinct behavioral differences and indicators regarding Qatar's approach in each of the crisis areas, which can be explained due to differences in conditions, structures, actors and interests. Since Qatar has chosen highlighting its image internationally and putting it as an influential player in the Middle East, especially in regional crises and conflicts, as one of the key pillars of its foreign policy, the new Arabic developments have provided it with important opportunities, of which this country tried to use for its own benefits by exploiting its soft and hard tools in the form of smart power. Another important point that has a key role in smart power is the use of media and media norms in management of public opinion. The Al Jazeera channel of Qatar has managed to play this role in regional developments and indeed, by choosing selective news, manage a part of the public opinion. On the other hand, Qatar has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world due to its major oil and gas reserves and the small population, and through relying this income, it has managed to find economic capabilities and become one of the main customers of weapons.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been traditionally one of the Arab World's pillars and has always claimed to be leader of the Arab World and Islamic World. The Saudi Kingdom, by the use of high income from selling oil, has tried to put the regions developments in their favor, in any possible ways. Saudi Arabia, with its vibrant presence in the regional developments from Libya and Egypt, to Syria and Pakistan, has tried to shape the future of the region in its favor. The Arabic media, especially the Saudi propaganda machine, "Al Arabia", since the onset of the Syrian crisis, have sparked the atmosphere of the region against the Shiites and, by paving the way for the Wahhabi elements, promoted the process of hostility to the Shiites throughout the region. The falsifications of these media would gradually blow up the region. In addition to the media systems, the Wahhabi mufti also issue a new fatwa against the Shiites every day, and spread the fire of divisions in the area. The Wahhabi ideology has turned into the firewood of regional wars from Libya to Syria and Yemen, which is being used not only against Shiites but also against Sunnis. In the Syria crisis, from the onset until now, Saudi Arabia has played a key role in deploying the extremist elements, money, and military equipment to Syria. Currently, regarding the Saudi Arabia and its Salafi offset weakening in Syria, some of their forces who are enrolled with ISIS, have entered Iraq and caused extensive insecurity in this country. However, the main issue in Iraq is not this insecurity, but it is the fate of power in Iraqi future. Lebanon has been long the scene for struggles and conflict between the regional and international powers. Traditionally, each of the powers have been linked to a part of the Lebanon's

internal streams. However, Saudi Arabia has always a different role in this country. Since Hariri's family has family ties with the Saudi dynasty, their interests have also become particularly tangled. In each crisis era in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia has been an effective element. Nowadays, Yemen has also become the scene for ethnic conflicts after years. The intelligence system of Saudi Arabia, for compensating their defeats in Syria and Iraq, has found Yemen a good spot for vengeance, as it sends daily, thousands of Salafis to Yemen from other regions, in order to massacre the "Al-Houthis" and "Zaidi" in this country. Saudi Arabia has made itself a solid foothold in Pakistan for many years. This country has managed to obtain good credit in Pakistan through building several mosques and city centers in different cities. But what is important about Pakistan is the tenacity and extreme prejudice of its people, as the highest number of Salafis and Takfiris belong to this country. Currently also, Pakistan has become a rich source of exporting dogmatic human source to other regions; however it should be noted that these forces are encouraged and stimulated by Saudi mufti in Pakistani religious schools. On the other hands, insurgent groups such as Jundallah and Jaish ul-Adl are supported by the Saudi Arabia's intelligence system. Saudi Arabia also tried to bring into power a Saudi-oriented state by overthrowing the Islamic Brotherhood government through a coup. And by doing this, annoyed Turkey, which made another gap in the opposition line of Assad. Saudi Arabia has come up with a zero-sum game and has eliminated its rivals wherever it has been able to, even those that were once confederate with it (<https://www.tasnimnews.com>).

Iraq

The Middle East, with a complex network of crises and conflicts, is always concerned with the upheavals that occur one after the other, as the upheavals of the Arabic Spring since 2011, followed by the sectarian and religious wars, as well as the rise of ISIS by terrorist operations and suicide bombings, all created chaos throughout the Middle East. It seems that elimination of the ISIS in Iraq and Syria would not put an end to the unrest, and a new season of changes is to come. On September's 25th, 2017, the regional state of Iraqi Kurdistan held a referendum for independence from the Iraqi government. The political watch and observers expect a wave of violent and intra-regional conflicts and transnational interventions followed by this decision of Kurdish people. For the Middle East, the Sykes-Picot agreement with the division of the Ottoman Empire, was not only a factor in the creation of new political units, but also made it possible to separate nations with imposed boundaries. These separated nations have always been seeking their background realms and the governments associated with them. The Kurds are a sample of these nations that as a non-homogeneous ethnic minority, are dispersed in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. The Iraqi Kurds in the Kurdistan region and with Arbil as its base, have an army called Peshmarga, took the opportunity to create an independent state and a new political unit in the conditions of Iraq's instability during the fight against ISIS, and have been prepared to proclaim independence and secession from Iraq. The Iraqi government, not freed from the damage by fight against the ISIS yet, do not deem the time appropriate for separation of Kurdistan and considers it as the beginning of the Iraqi collapse. The most important challenge for Iraq is losing a big proportion of its lands, which is equal to weakening of the national power. Turkey also considers this separation as a serious mistake, because politically, this Kurdish minority,

within Turkey and in the borders areas, with a neighbor like Syria, has always been a geopolitical threat for Ankara. On the other hand and economically, with a trade volume of \$ 10 billion between the two sides and the use of Ceyhan's Turkish port as the main output of Kurdish oil exports with one million barrels exporting per day, Turkey's dissatisfaction would be equal to economic pressure on Kurdistan. Despite Iran's policy on non-interference in the affairs of the neighbors and other nations, and having a Kurdish minority, it has viewed Kurdistan's independence as a potential threat, which could turn into a regional crisis. However, the Kurds may not be as lonely as they seem to be, and can have some supporters. Supporters such as the US and Russia which have always been concerned with their national interests in the Middle East. The sensitive position of Kurdistan plays the controlling role for the three countries as Iraq, Turkey, and Iraq. Since the historic claims of the Kurds have always been repressed by neighboring countries, they have been reluctant to convey their fate to regional powers, and enjoy US support. For trump also, the Kurds have been the best ally in the fight against ISIS, and its independence is the best opportunity for achievement to the loyalty between the friends in the region. However, it should be noted that although Iraqi Kurdistan is a strong ally to the US, it is a relatively poor and highly oil-dependent country as an independent state, while Iraq, compared to Kurdistan, is more developed and more experienced as an independent state. Also, for Washington, the result of the agreement with Kurdistan's independence could be cold relations with Turkey which has a solid economy and an alliance NATO, and Iraq, which is a military ally of the United States (www.irdiplomacy.ir).

Iran

Iran, due to being located in the Middle East, is faced with major dangers, challenges, and upheavals in its security. The Middle East is a unique region of the world in which, no agreed security arrangement and stability has been established yet. The region still faces a great volume of instability and insecurity and even with the success of the major areas of the international community and regional countries in the establishment of a comprehensive and sustainable security system, and despite some efforts, there is still no signs of the establishment of such a security system in the periphery of Iran. On the other hand, the role of the Middle East powers in establishment of stability and security should also be taken into consideration. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a regional power, has an important role in establishment of security in the Middle East and can play a central role in establishment of stability and resolving the long-lasting crises, in a constructive interaction with other countries in the region. Iran, in its perimeter environment, has always been facing with several and continuous challenges and problems and these issues have been reproduced in all areas of this security environment, as the country has not yet been able to see an agreement on a stable and solid security framework in any of these areas. Currently, terrorism and extremism, the weak states and the authoritarian crisis, as well as intergovernmental interventions, are the three main security challenges in the perimeter environment of Iran, which have a close and multi-dimensional relationship. The security approach of Iran, based on the recent years experiences and changes in the region, has components and elements that can lead to formation of a stable security system, in case of the regional attention and efforts. The first component of this approach is the reduction of the

military appearance of the regional powers that has led to the intensification of extremism and terrorism and the destruction of cooperation and natural relations of the countries of the region. The second component is cooperation and participation of the regional players in the security structure, especially contemplating and cooperating with larger countries such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in resolving common challenges, such as terrorism, and managing interagency patterns of intra-national ethnic-religious groups, with national units. Regarding the extensiveness of the security challenges and conflicts in the Middle East, and effectiveness of different factors in intra-national, national, regional, and interregional levels in the insecurity and instability in the region, establishment of security in the framework of a partnership-based security model requires a gradual and long-term process.

Egypt

Why is Egypt important in security-political affairs of the Middle East? The importance of Egypt is due to the specific characteristics of this country. The coalition of each of the regional players with Egypt, increases the weight of the power play in favor of that player. Egypt is the golden key of dominating the Arabic Middle East. That is why an extensive competition is running among the regional players such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and interregional players such as United States, for proximity to Egypt. Egypt, just like Iran and Turkey, has a strong national government with as rich historical background and identity, and based on this fact, claims to play an active role in regional affairs. This characteristic of Egypt has made other countries to get close to it. Also, Egypt is the representative for a strong security-political current in the power and politics relations in the Arabic Middle East.

The Role of Energy in the Middle East Crisis

Currently, although there is no all-out war between the countries of the Middle East, this region is facing a range of confrontations and nomadic wars, local conflicts, the collapse of governments, and the power exhibition of insurgent nongovernmental groups. This indicates the risk of energy transmission from the region that is the world's first producer and exporter of hydrocarbons. In addition, all over this region, due to being located between the Europe, Africa, and Asia, has a high importance for energy transit, and is a key region. The low price of oil and gas, the drastic increase in the US' oil production, the outburst of new energy sources, and Iran's nuclear deal, may all suggest that energy security has less risks than before. Except Libya and Iraq, the main oil producers are not facing with severe conflict and insurgency and even in Iraq, the conflict have not directly affected the main areas of oil production in the southern parts of the country. However, the rise in the US' oil and gas production might decrease the risks of the disruption in energy supply, it does not obviate them. The current low price of the oil is considered as a threat to the economic and social stability of several oil and gas producers, and would have unknown consequences for them. In the long term, the world's energy market atmosphere may become redundant, and new exporters and new damage will emerge. The threat against energy infrastructures may happen in any scales from individual criminal acts, sabotage or terrorism, to the great regional wars. The Middle East and North Africa regions are vital for the world economy due to great volume of production and transmission of oil and gas.

Although some authors believe that the number terrorist attacks against the energy is ignorable, the recent trend indicates a great increase in the terrorist attacks against oil and gas.

Russia in the Middle East

The presence of Russia in the Middle East is due to several important reasons. The first reason is the preservation of the current state in the region. The second reason is the fight against the terrorism and preventing it from spreading to Russia lands. And finally, it should be taken into consideration that simultaneous with the decrease in the US' presence and participation in the Middle East, Russia is seeking to increase its influence on the region. It has provided Russia with a good opportunity to, as an actor, do the saber-rattling beyond its boundaries, when threatened. In Russian statesmen point of view, there is a close relationship between foreign military participation with the aim of regime change on the one hand, and instability and emergence of terrorist threats on the other. The Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya wars are good samples for proving this claim. In fact, the terrorist threats form a major part of the logic of Russia presence and action in the Middle East. Regarding the presence of the insurgents in the North Caucasus, who are directly supported by the Extremists of the Middle East, Russia has achieved the valuable experience that how dangerous it can be for this country to underestimate the potential terrorist threats. Therefore, one of the key attention in the Middle Eastern policy of Russia is opposition to the procedures that may lead to the higher instabilities in the region. Finally, it should be noted that simultaneous with the decrease in the US' presence and participation in the Middle East, Russia is seeking to increase its influence on the region. It has provided Russia with a good opportunity to, as an actor, do the saber-rattling beyond its boundaries, when threatened. In my opinion, it is consistent with the main goal of Russia which is preservation of the current state with weakening of the US-supporting regimes in Persian Gulf.

The Role of the United States in Creation and Extension of Crisis in the Middle East

In the modern world conditions, the United States of America seeks to establish and dominate the security policy (one-polar) in the region. Therefore, in the 90's and after Kuwait war, the geopolitical calculations of Washington are focused on weakening the Persian Gulf's regional powers and based on the political implications of the doctrine of the President of the United States (George W. Bush), a new polarity emerged following the developments of September 2001, which had an impact on the international order in general, and the Persian Gulf in specific. The Americans sought to, not only put Iran and Iraq in the axis of terror, but also add other Arabic countries (such as Saudi Arabia) to this axis in case they were not actively cooperating in the fight against the Salafi ideological foundations that are seen as a symbol of the threat to the United States. The one polar security order strategy in Persian Gulf imposed by the United States requires creation of gaps between two categories of countries in the Persian Gulf. One category is the countries which are in lines with the United States, and the second category is the countries whose policies are inconsistent with those of the US. The greater the gap between the Gulf Cooperation Council on the one hand and Iran on the other hand, the policy of the one polar security system will also be closer to its goal. Therefore, the United

States will be the most important obstacle on the establishment of any kinds of comprehensive security order. The US' stimulations are in lines with its goals and strategies in the Persian Gulf and bilateral containment policies.

RESULTS

The first approach in the outbreak of the Middle East crises, takes into consideration the external factors, rather than internal issues and factors. Concepts such as colonialism and exploitation are at the center of this approach analysis. These concepts show that this approach is related to the leftist current or the very Marxists. The approach believes that the developed countries, through colonizing and exploiting the undeveloped countries, extracted their resources and stored them in their own countries. These resources enabled the colonizers to use them for their economic growth, social transformation, and political development. Finally, the economic growth, social transformation, political development led to the increase in the gap between the developed and undeveloped countries, and made the undeveloped countries to be dependent on the colonizers. In fact, by creation of the gap between the developed and undeveloped countries through giving loans the undeveloped countries, the developed countries made them more dependent on themselves. These loans increased every year. Instead, the undeveloped countries were not able to pay back. Therefore, these countries were never able to achieve a strong state in order to spread their superiority all over their land. The result is that today, the undeveloped countries including the Middle East countries, are involved with internal problems and complications. The second approach, which is more of a critical one, explores the roots of the political, economic, military, social, and cultural incidents within the countries. The social construct, political culture, the managerial power of the political elite, people knowledge level, and etc. are among the basic elements of this approach. These elements have more of a critical approach to the society, and explores the root of the incidents within the countries, rather than finding an external root for them. Based on this approach, the tribal structure and populist political culture, and the elite's inability to manage human and material resources are factors that have led to the backwardness of these countries. The weak states seem to be subject to a more fundamental challenge of authority, which provokes two other

factors, namely the spread of terrorism and extremism, as well as the spread of influence and interference of interregional powers. The weak and fragile governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan leads to the spread of terrorism and extremism and in addition, makes the ground for continuance of interregional presence. In the Arabian countries of the southern margin of the Persian Gulf, the crisis of authority and weakness of the state has provided a ground for asymmetric cooperation with international powers and increased foreign powers' interventions. These issues, regarding the ethnic and social constructs of the region and the specific experiences of the state-nation, leads to the complications in the security conditions. Ethnic differences, the existence of authoritarian states, the crisis of legitimacy, the absence of democracy and civil institutions, along with weak economies in some Central Asian and Caucasian countries, are among other factors that will lead to instability and insecurity in Iran's security environment. Iran's approach towards its perimeter is based on the cooperation and participation. In this approach, serious engagement of all countries in the region and effective cooperation in this regard are central to the organization of the regional security structure. On the other hand, the continued presence of interregional powers in regional security arrangements is a major contributor to increasing conflicts and tensions at the regional level.

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