

A conceptualization of the Middle Eastern security structure: Proxy wars of all against all

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Abstract: The 9/11 caused chaotic order in the Middle East in two episodes. The first episode starts from 2001 and ends in 2011, but the second episode start from 2011 and continues till date. The active military intervention as attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq was not able to destroy the Taliban and Al Qaida. Also, the collapse of Saddam Hussein has created a complex instability in the country. This was a turning point for Iran to widening its influence over Iraq without paying huge cost. The new situation disrupted the regional balance of power and has caused concerns for rival actors such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The current state of instability and regional disorder in Middle East is mismanagement of crises and developments held from 2001 to 2011. This study shows that after 2011, religious conflicts and geopolitical competitions had a huge regional transformation from a relatively static state to a quite chaotic condition. It seems that the time has come and the countries involved in the conflict, must sign a comprehensive and durable convention on all aspects like the Westphalia post-war period. The involved countries must realize that they have to avoid the spread of proxy war to an unlimited war between nations in the Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

International systems are a function of the structural dynamics and product of how power is distributed among actors on both the global and international dimensions.

Looking through the diplomacy history shows that a new form of the regional and international order has emerged under the influence of influential forces. The global consensus upon US invasion of Iraq in 1991 marked the beginning of an American-centered New World Order. The unipolar US-centric system with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly showed a strong tendency for unrest. The US's efforts to extend liberal democracy to countries that were not ready, caused fragile systems to collapse, especially in the Middle East. These efforts have caused street riots in the Middle East since 2010 and gave signals to regional and global powers for deep intervention.

Russia's strong and determined return to the international system was marked by the Georgian crisis. Support for regimes and organizations that were inherently hostile to the US or could have challenged US interests in the region became a central focus of Russian policy.

Thus, some countries in the Middle East, such as Iran and Syria that were backed by Russia, opposed the United States and the monopoly system in the 2000s, and thus deserved the title of the 'axis of evil' by the United States.

The emergence of Turkey also added to the complexity of the structure of the Middle East's international system. Turkey, as an ally of the West, introduced a new definition of its national interests that did not conform to the structure of the unipolar international system.

The theory 'the world is bigger than five' was put forward with the aim of opposing the old international system and establishing a new one. Saudi Arabia, which was deeply concerned about Iran's growing power in the region after the fall of Saddam Hussain, also sought to thwart Iran's influence in the region. Thus, the ideals of Turkish Multilateralism and Strategic Depth, Iranian resistance, Saudi's Wahhabism and American Liberal Democracy emerged in Middle Eastern politics which led the conflicts after 2010.

AIM, METHOD AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the present study is to provide an analytical framework based on the developments in the Middle East in the 2000s. The authors seek to shed light on the endless disputes based on the foreign policy behavior of regional powers including Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the authors seek to describe the dimensions of their behavior.. Each of these powers has its own geopolitical worldview for the Middle East which causes friction between them. Thus, inspired by Thomas Hobbes, the authors seek to conceptualize the proxy 'war of all against all' in the Middle East. Authors conclude that Religion is the main base for conflicts in the Middle East, while ethnic metaphors are also contributing in it relatively.

Raymond Hinnebusch blames all Middle Eastern actors for creating the Hobbesian conflicts in the Middle East, intentionally or unintentionally. Sense of insecurity speedily increases the accumulation of power and warfighting capabilities of states. This causes more insecurity and mutual military antagonism in the region. In his view, the failure of efforts to establish a security order means that peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved (Hinnebusch 2003, 154-155). Ian O. Lesser shares the same view with Raymond and believes that the developments in the Middle East have become a 'homeland' issue for the US and requires military presence and intervention of Western powers (Lesser 2004, 253-255). Also, Bilal Saab (2014) emphasizes on the military dimension of rivalries the Middle East. Holliday (2005) has also explored various issues such as religious and nationalist in the context of historical sociology that triggered wars in the Middle East.

Gumbo (2014) argues that changing identity-based policies is the key to explain conflicts in the Middle East, where tribal, ethnic-religious, nationalist, and ideological rivalries can address all Middle East conflicts in Hobbesian theory. Zulfqar (2018) highlights the role of global actors in the region, Ehteshami (2014) emphasizes on the regional dimension of rivalries between Iran, Turkey, KSA, and Israel. Del Sarto and colleagues (2019) sheds light on the Arab-Israeli conflict as one of the important structural features of regional politics but Marc Lynch and Amaney Jamal (2019) are insisting on weakening America in regional politics and believing that US foreign policy toward Iran's nuclear case has weakened the position of American allies in the Middle East. As such, there seems to be little consensus on the causes

of the post-2011 proxy wars in the Middle East and the researchers are looking at the issue with their own perspective.

HIERARCHY OF POWER STRUCTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is an exceptional magnet for foreign intervention. This process begins according to the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarja, signed between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1774, and Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798 according to some other scholars. These events have triggered the process of seeing the Middle East as a 'game scene'. Thus, to understand Middle East politics, the perspective of the western states that develop policies towards the region is more important than the factors that arise from the region itself (Özpek 2002, 190).

The fall of Saddam in 2003 led to the collapse of the regional balance of power. In addition, the collapse of the Ba'athist government caused major socio-political turmoil and change. The direct entrance of the US to the Middle East scene provoked Iran to find some groups in Iraq. At the same time, the Jihadist Groups came to Iraq and made this country as a ground for battle against the US. Finally, Iraq entered a bloody civil war and the US could not fight to all of these groups. Moreover, the invasion of Iraq, which broke the Iraqi army, airpower, and economy, enabled Iran to emerge as an important regional power and led to Iran to increase its power in the region, especially in Iraq (Çelik 2014, 42).

IRAQ'S SOCIAL DYNAMICS AFTER SADDAM HUSSAIN

The invasion of Iraq and the collapse of Saddam Hussein disrupted the country's social and political structure. Iraq was a tribal country with many religions and tribes living in it. For nearly 70 years, the social order of Iraq has been depriving some tribes and religions. Saddam Hussein was one of the main supporters of the existing social structure of Iraq, and during his time, tribal systems and religions were severely suppressed. As a result of his fall, the situation suddenly changed and caused a vacuum of power in the country. This situation has also made Shiites and Kurds more powerful. The Shia's empowerment caused the Sunnis to be very dissatisfied and set them apart from the core of the government.

In this situation, Al Qaida saw the opportunity for attracting people around the world to support them and to fighting against the occupiers of Iraq and to widening the war throughout the Middle East. This state

was like the war against the Soviet Union (Wither 2008, 113). The Jihadist announced a war against foreigners in Iraq and the Iraqis who helped them. Thus they made Iraq as a nest for terrorist groups. The US which wanted to bring democracy and peace to Iraq and make Iraq as a sample for other states was not successful. Thus the Al Qaida exported the terrorist to the whole of the Middle East after the crisis in Syria started. Therefore, Iran used the American democracy to come to Iraq as Shiite groups gained the majority of the parliamentary elections in 2005. This transformation provided legitimacy to al-Qaeda to launch a campaign against foreign forces, the Iraqi central government, and other religious groups. Therefore, a small spark needed to lead to a religious and sectarian war. The events in Tunisia in 2011 triggered the spark to reach other countries in the region and entered the region to the Hobbesian system.

THE INVOLVED ACTORS ON HOBBSIAN SYSTEM IN, AFTER 2011

The main actors in the proxy wars of the post-2011 period are dissatisfied states. Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Qatar, and the UAE are the region's most effective countries. They sent their proxies from various countries to fight the main battlefields in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. This war has led countries like Syria and Yemen to face almost complete destruction of infrastructures. Libya and Iraq have also faced a heavy destroying process. The result of the war in these countries was a severe weakening of the central government. This weakness has caused eccentric and calls for the independence and fragmentation of all the involved countries.

IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA IN SYRIA

The government of Syria is the only strategic ally of Iran in the world and has vital importance to Iranian foreign policy in the region. Also, Syria is the only Arab country that supported Iran during its war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988. Yemen and Iraq are important sides of Iran's regional policy. Iran has been able to surround Saudi Arabia with proxy forces in the north and south of the country and create insecurity feeling in Saudi policymakers. Iran's policy has also led to huge insecurity in Israel. Clemon believes that 'ISIS, in fact, may have been a major part of Bandar's covert-ops strategy in Syria' (Clemon 2014). Saudi Arabia supported Salafi / Jihadist groups between 2011- 2013. It also supported Salafists / Jihadis till Mosul

seized by ISIS in July 2014, which part of them had been in Iraq since 2006. Saudi Arabia's goal was to facilitate the collapse of the Assad regime. On the other hand, Iran has supported the Assad regime (Baghishadbad 2016, 119-120). In spite of all these measures, none of Saudi Arabia's goals have been achieved in Syria and even led to an adverse outcome. Saudi Arabia loses influence and its actor role in Syria after seven years of the bloody war. In 2012 Iran has created Homeland Defense Forces in Syria with 100 thousand members (Alhall 2016). The Fatimiyoun Brigade has 28 thousand members. The members of this Brigade are Shiites of Afghanistan who fighting in Syria to defend Shiite values especially Hazrat Zainab Shrine (Ensafnews 2017). The other brigade is the Zainabiyoun Brigade with more than 2 thousand fighters. The Brigade's members are Pakistani Shiites who fighting for Shiite values (Behzadi 2015). These groups plus Lebanon's Hezbollah are very highly motivated to fight against Iranian enemies. Moreover, the shape of the groups is like to Iranian Basij Forces who belong to revolutionary guards but formed by the Revolutionary Guards' external branch the Qods Guards.

YEMEN

In Yemen, the crisis process is the same as in Syria. Although the main tensions and conflicts are based in Yemen, foreign players continue to affect the calculations of foreign actors and regional actors (Salisbury 2015, 1). In 2011 the Houthis had 100 thousand members (Almasmari 2011). They entered Sanaa, the capital city of Yemen in December 2014. They captured all of the governmental departments and organizations. It is clear that today the Houthis is one of the important and not-ignorable Yemen's political figures. Saudi attacks on Yemen empowered the group by gaining the asymmetric war experience. The most important foreign players in Yemen are Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia and the UAE in another. The two sides have had an intense cold war since 2015 and yet the war is going on and it seems that the two sides are unable to remove each other on the battlefield. The two sides, especially Iran, refuse direct war and prefer to fight indirectly (Grumet 2015, 14). Iran has been able to undermine Saudi Arabia's energy by engaging Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni war.

BAHRAIN

Bahrain is a small country with great capabilities for Iran and Saudi Arabia. 70 percent of the population is Shiites and the rest are Sunnis

(World Population Review 2019). Since independence in 1971 from Iran, has been dominated by a Sunni government under the control of Saudi Arabia. When the Arab Spring arrived in Bahrain in February 2011, the government of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia accused Iran of interfering in people's demonstrations and suppressed protestors. In March 2011, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent about 2,000 troops - 1,200 from Saudi Arabia and 800 from the United Arab Emirates - to Bahrain. These forces were deployed as part of a GCC-backed force (Bronner and Slackman 2011). This military intervention was due to fears by the authorities of the Persian Gulf states of the collapse of the Bahraini government by the majority of the Shiites. Although the world has forgotten this military strike, despite all the actions of the government forces along with the foreign forces, they have not been able to completely suppress the people. Iran has been able to erode Saudi Arabia's energy in Bahrain.

IRAQ

Iran and Saudi Arabia perceive Iraq as a zero-sum game field. Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein the two countries had been seeing Iraq as a Proxy in the future (Wehrey et Al. 2009, 98-99). Saudi Arabia has played an important role in supporting anti-Shiite Jihad in Iraq. Saudi Arabia is pursuing two regional strategies. The first one is Jihad. On the one hand, the Saudis encourage jihad as a useful tool for anti-Shiite politics around the world, on the other hand, they suppress Jihadists at home as a threat to the status quo. In WikiLeaks documents released in 2009, the ex-US secretary of state Hillary Clinton believes Saudi Arabia is a vital pillar for al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist groups (Cockburn 2014). Finally, the Iraqi government recaptured the occupied areas in 2017. The main advantage of Iran from this crisis is to the foundation of the Hashd al-Shabi forces with a member of 140 thousand (Mashreghnews 05.01.2017) which is ready to serve Iran's goals in the region.

LEBANON

The other field of cold competition is in Lebanon, which is in a dangerous political situation. In November 2017, the Lebanese Prime Minister was forced to resign during a diplomatic travel in Saudi Arabia, who, after numerous mediations by foreign leaders, he gave up from his resignation. This crisis seems to have isolated Saudi Arabia in the region (Sadri Alibabalu 2017). Before this crisis, there were

presidency election problems in Lebanon. The interference of Saudi Arabia led Lebanon to a political scene for two and a half years. But eventually, a Hezbollah supported figure Michel Aoun was elected to the presidency in 2016 (Perry and Bassam 2016). Hezbollah is considered the largest non-governmental army in the world, with 60,000 armed forces. In addition, close sources to Hezbollah have estimated the number of Hezbollah's missiles around 100 thousand (Aaddiyar 2015). However, Iran plays its role in Lebanon through Hezbollah. In Lebanon's political scene, Saudi Arabia lost the game to its Iranian opponent. On behalf of Iran, Hezbollah is doing the game in Lebanon. At the same time, this group is Iran's most powerful proxy in the region.

COLD WAR BETWEEN TURKEY AND IRAN

It is important to note that Turkish relations toward the Middle East increased in the period of the AK Party. Iran and Turkey is the oldest neighbor to each other. Regional cooperation of the two countries increased in the period of AKP till 2011. Turkey supported Iran in its negotiations on the nuclear program and even since 2006 Turkey sought to play a moderate role in the Iranian nuclear program (Hentov 2011, 32). Moreover, Turkey planned to set a new visa-free zone includes Syria, Lebanon Jordan and Libya (Santini and Alessandri 2011, 2). This period is one of the samples of the Lockean system in the Middle East as Turkey sought to make a balance in its relations toward the West and East and to the foundation of regional cooperation.

SYRIA

Arab uprisings put the two countries on the hostile front though they did not enter a direct war. The most important issue is the Syrian civil war where Iran supporting the central government, while Turkey gave important support to opposition. Turkey has a border long 800 square kilometers. Turkish policymakers have had a big worry about border security. Anyway, they tried to help their like-minded side. In addition to Iran, Turkish relations with Russia experienced a hard period. The crisis increased when the Syrian air defense downed a Turkish fighter on 22 June 2012 (Denmir 2012). In retaliating it Turkey downed two Syrian helicopters in 2013 and 2015 and a Syrian fighter plane in 2014 and (Hürriyet 17.05.2015). In the end, Turkey downed a Russian plane in 2015 and the crisis increased to a critical point (Karadeniz and

Kiselyova 2015). By the downing of the Russian plane, the relation between the two countries decreased to the lowest level. During this crisis, it was felt that the Syrian civil war became a widespread war in the region. But the policymakers in Turkey and Russia managed to control the crisis.

IRAQ

Iraq is a country where Turkey and Iran have suffered a lot. This country has a bloody war experience against Iran. Moreover, after the international coalition invaded Iraq in 1991, the government failed to take full control of its territory. As a result, Kurdish groups in northern Iraq have freely campaigned against the territorial sovereignty of Turkey and Iran. The greatest danger of the activities of these groups, especially the PKK terrorist group, has been against Turkey. PKK has used the power vacuum created by the international coalition invasion of Iraq and has created illegal bases in the harsh mountainous areas of northern Iraq. The two countries have intense competition in Iraq after the collapse of Saddam Hussein. In this competition, Iran supported the central government that was under the control of Shiite groups. Naturally, this situation disturbed most of the Sunni countries especially Turkey. In 2009 Turkey signed an agreement with the Iraqi Kurdish Government on the importation of oil, at the same time Turkey strengthened relations with the KRG (Barkey 2010, 3). Considering that in this agreement, Ankara should address the central government, it caused Iraqi government dissatisfaction. Iran and Turkey sought a huge competition in Iraq, especially on the KRG. While their rivalry made the regional Kurdish regional government take advantage of the opportunity to take steps to independence. The ISIS' occupation of Mosul showed the peak of the crisis. In this crisis, ISIS occupied widespread parts of northern Iraq. This led to the strengthening of the Massoud Barzani's administration. The rivalry between the two countries was close to breaking up Iraq. However, after the referendum for independence of North Iraq on September 25, 2017 held by the KRG, Iran, and Turkey touched the danger and, in cooperation with the Iraqi central government, began to curb Barzani's crisis and finally they suppressed him.

THE COMPETITION BETWEEN SUNNI COUNTRIES

Since 2002, Turkey has been run by the AKP. The triumphant success of this party in various fields has led to the presentation of a Turkish-

Islamic model of democracy in the Muslim world. This political democratic model is not suitable for countries with a kingdom system. Looking through the street protests in Arab countries in 2011, there were quiet discussions about the implementation of the Turkish model in Arab countries. But in practice, most Arab countries have opposed this model. The main opponents of the Turkish-Islamic democracy system are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt.

In 2013, Egypt's president Mohammad Morsi fell by Saudi supported a distractive and bloody coup. The coup has put heavy blows on the Muslim Brotherhood. This caused Turkey and Qatar into cold relations with Saudi Arabia. Turkey's relations with Egypt were also cut off after the coup. In 2014, Saudi Arabia recognized the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups and ISIL as terrorist organizations. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have pushed Qatar to cut ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and withdrawn their ambassadors. In these sectarian conflicts, it seems that the Sunnis do not tolerate each other as they do not tolerate Shiite (Gause 2014, 16-18). An important issue was the assassination of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Turkey in 2018, which heightened tensions between the two sides, and Turkey was able to exert tremendous pressure on Saudi Arabia and put it on the global scandal. Due to the lack of trust, competition within the Persian Gulf is continuing. Saudi Arabia's competition with the United Arab Emirates has made the Yemen crisis more complicated. The United Arab Emirates is seeking the establishment of a new state in the south of Yemen. But Saudi Arabia supports President Mansour Hadi (Garrie 2018). The rivalry between the two countries may add a new front to the Yemen war. It seems that the continuation of Yemen's equality as one country is not anticipated.

The main crisis between these countries peaked in 2017. Saudi Arabia forced Egypt, the UAE, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and the Maldives to cut off their ties with Qatar on the pretext of supporting terrorism. But this crisis led to the strategic ties between Turkey and Iran against the Arabic countries of the region, as well as it showed the huge gap between the fragile Arab alliances that had been hidden for many years (Sadri Alibabalu, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Given the objective examples of Hobbes's anarchic model, the Middle East is experiencing a very complex situation today. This situation is

similar to the 30-year-old wars in the seventeenth century, which placed Western conflicts in a turbulent state and ultimately led to peace agreements in Westphalia in 1648. In the Middle Eastern conflicts, religion has been the driving force behind conflict. The parties to the conflict have tried to pursue the ideology of their foreign policy. Therefore, the national interests and the struggle for power have been the main cause of these wars. The efforts of regional powers to consolidate their hegemony on the Middle East have been on this path.

The countries such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have been the main actors in the post-2011 conflicts in the region. The battlefield is Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Egypt. The only country that seems to have managed to keep itself out of the regional conflicts is Oman. However, Oman's policymakers are more inclined to Iranian foreign policy in the region. Particularly, in the case of Yemen, Oman has adopted a balanced policy between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the Libyan civil war, the Middle Eastern actors could not interfere because Libya is far from their borders.

Meanwhile, the role of great powers has been very serious. Putting Russia on the Syrian-Iranian block and placing America in Saudi Arabia and the UAE side has provoked the regional actors' policies. Meanwhile, the role of Israel has been very serious. Israel has tried to keep away conflicts from its borders and to form an Arabic alliance against Iran. In the overall conclusion, Israel's alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Iran did not have a serious impact on the conflicts.

In the overall assessment, it is possible to conclude that Iran played a significant and active role in the conflicts after 2011. The Middle East has attracted many actors as the Eurasian subsystem and has never been empty of the crisis over the past 100 years. The instability and power vacuum in the region have highlighted Iran's role, as Iran's role has never been so high before. The number of proxy forces Iran has formed in the region is approximately 400,000. These forces are ideologically highly prepared to sacrifice their lives for Iran.

Comparatively, Saudi Arabia lost its influence in the region since 2011. Besides of this, Saudi policymakers' have given strategic opportunities to Iran with their regional mistakes. It seems that Saudi politicians do not know the rules of the game in the perilous land. The results of the crises in Yemen, Qatar, and Lebanon have been the opposite of the wishes of Saudi Arabia. The Qatari crisis has caused

Qatar's excessive proximity to Iran and Turkey on the one hand and the proximity of Turkey and Iran on the other.

The evaluation of Turkey's role is complicated and difficult. The country's domestic and foreign policy scene has changed since 2011. The most important issue was the coup attempt in 2016, which was failed by the people's resistance. Today, it seems that Turkey is moving its own way and trying to play a balancer role in the regional crises. Of course, Turkey has cold relations with some countries in the region. With the entrance of troops into Syria in August 2016, Turkey has tried to defeat terrorist forces in the north of Syria which are threatening the territorial integrity of Turkey.

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