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DYNAMICS OF THE CHANGING GLOBAL SECURITY ORDER



EMERGING TRENDS AND KEY ISSUES IN ASIA

Edited by SENTHAN SELVARAJAH, NESRIN KENAR, and LORENZO FIORITO

Dynamics of the Changing Global Security Order

Dynamics of the Changing Global Security Order

Emerging Trends and Key Issues in Asia

Edited by
Senthan Selvarajah, Nesrin Kenar, and
Lorenzo Fiorito

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Senthan Selvarajah, Nesrin Kenar, and Lorenzo Fiorito

The Changing Global Security Order

An Introduction

Nesrin Kenar,[1] Senthan Selvarajah,[2]
and Lorenzo Fiorito[3]

There is an inherent problem with analyzing current events: they change quickly. By the time authors have captured the essence of those experiences to create a record, evaluated that distilled reading against their framework's hypotheses, and put analysis into print, their work is—at least partly—out of date. Just as astronomers track shifts in starlight—millennia after the star itself has changed position—so observers of history must constantly and humbly acknowledge the limits of their ability to "know."

And this, in the Age of Twitter.

This book has faced that problem. From the time it was conceptually conceived to the time it went to press, at least two seismic changes to the global security order had taken place: the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Tensions with China predated both of these developments. Each of these situations, in its own way, contributes to changes in the global security order.

THE US'S WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN AND FREEZING OF AFGHANISTAN'S ASSETS

On August 15, 2021, Taliban fighters entered Kabul. The Afghan President went into exile (Ward, Lister, Dewan, and Mehsud, 2021). Simultaneously, the Biden administration froze $9 billion' worth of Afghanistan's Central Bank assets abroad (Mohsin, 2021). Two decades since the United States invaded Afghanistan after September 11, an era seems to have closed.

The measure of freezing Afghanistan's assets in place of military confrontation with the Taliban seems to uphold Luttwak's hypothesis (Luttwak,

1990) that economic tactics could replace military measures in some areas of security thinking. Increasingly, analysts have commented that a geoeconomic world order may have begun to take shape (Roberts, Moraes, and Ferguson, 2018). This model would involve close cooperation between states' interests and their financial and commercial sectors' behavior—including that of explicitly national actors like sovereign wealth funds and state-owned enterprises (Babic, 2021).

In other words, it is possible that while the United States proved unable to control the Taliban through "boots on the ground" in the War on Terror, it now believes it can do so more effectively through measures that invoke regulatory control over the financial and banking system, including targeted sanctions and asset freezes. This could reflect a more generalized approach to the international security order, where economic tactics achieve strategic security objectives.

Today, neither the practice of direct American military intervention nor its role as the single global hegemon of the world order can be taken for granted. Thus, the global security order that depended on its position is under challenge.

RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

Geoeconomics is not, however, the only pathway forward. Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has implications that stand in diametric opposition to this introduction's speculation about a geoeconomic world order.

While NATO formally remains on the sidelines, Ukraine continues to appeal for NATO involvement (Deliso, 2022). There is a credible geopolitical threat to global stability for the first time since the Cold War. Thirty-three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a new era may have opened: the "return of geopolitics," as Mead phrased it (Mead, 2014).

This new era, if that is what it proves to be, will be dangerous. At the time of writing (late May, 2022). It appears unlikely that Russia or Ukraine will emerge as a victor in the short term. Meanwhile, Switzerland made a nearly unheard-of exception to its neutrality policy (He, 2022; Revill, 2022), leveraging its banking sector to impose sanctions and asset freezes on Russian targets. Formerly neutral Finland and Sweden have applied to join NATO (Wright, 2022).

"We're now facing a fundamentally changed security environment in Europe," the *Washington Post* reported Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson as saying. The NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, agreed that Finland's and Sweden's accession would be a "turning point

for security" in Europe (Hudson, Morris, Bisset, and Berger, 2022). CBS reported:

> Finland's accession to NATO will cause serious damage to bilateral Russian–Finnish relations and maintenance of stability and security in the Northern European region," the [Russian] Foreign Ministry said. "Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, to neutralize the threats to its national security that arise from this. (CBS News, 2022)

For its part, India has taken a strident tone in support of Russia. As a UN Security Council vote on Ukraine loomed, India cited "US neo-primacy" as a factor in voting against the discussion on Ukraine (Express Tribune, 2022). In response to a question from the Norwegian foreign minister Huitfeldt, Indian foreign minister Jaishankar stated: "You talked about Ukraine. I remember less than a year ago what happened in Afghanistan, where the entire civil society was thrown under the bus by the world. We in Asia face our own sets of challenges, which often has an impact on the rules-based order." Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission commented that the invasion of Ukraine would "deeply affect the Indo-Pacific region and the rest of the world" (Roy, 2022).

FALLOUT FROM RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

Back in 1997, George F. Kennan questioned the wisdom of expanding NATO. He wrote that (Kennan, 1997):

> expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.

In addition to his questionable motivations of upholding international law, supporting the right of self-determination, and de-Nazifying Ukraine, Russian leader Putin more accurately expressed his fear of NATO expansion to Russia's borders as his reason to invade (The Spectator, 2022). However, in the same speech announcing Russia's attack on Ukraine, he also cited countries that are now permanently destabilized or nonexistent after US or NATO intervention: Iraq, Libya, Syria, and the former Yugoslavia. Rather ominously in this context, Putin stated: "our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories."

The Russian intervention experience in Syria could provide a mooring for this statement. According to Jones (2022),

> Russian leaders wanted to stabilize Syria, which was under threat, as a strategically-important hub for Moscow in the Middle East . . . . Russian leaders assessed that the United States and its partners were attempting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime and either replace it with a friendly government or leave behind a collapsed state. Russian officials were influenced by the U.S. military campaigns in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and other countries, where they concluded that the United States had repeatedly demonstrated an ability and willingness to destabilize and even overthrow regimes.

This leads to one branch of speculation conspicuously absent from much coverage of the developing security situation. Putin's motivation may not be to annex Ukraine in full, as he did the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Rather, it may be to create a permanently destabilized zone in the heart of Europe, from which crisis could easily spill over.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine now elicits sober considerations of the relative value of hard power—the very dynamic that the liberal international order was designed to forestall under the Bretton Woods agreement (World Trade Organization, 2022). Certainly, Western responses to Russia's invasion imply a pivot away from the geopolitical architecture that made the post-war order possible. Yet, some Indian commentators indicate nuance to the possibilities that could emerge. Talukdar (2023) writes of Indian engagement with Europe,

> Notwithstanding the Ukraine war—a development that is causing tectonic shifts in global geopolitics—New Delhi and Brussels are showing political will, determination and maturity in not letting differences over one issue disturb the tempo that is moving towards rapid formalisation of [their] partnership. [Indian Prime Minister] Modi's ongoing visit to Europe, his engagement with the continent's powerhouses in Germany and France and his attention toward Europe's Scandinavian subregions are but one dimension of the evolving multi-faceted, multi-dimensional relationship.

The Ukraine invasion indicates the post–World War II liberal international order is in serious trouble. Some are declaring it dead (Rodrik, 2022). The invasion of Ukraine, accompanied by the expansion of NATO, could be a tacit admission by all actors that this prognosis is correct.

FAILINGS OF THE PRESENT GLOBAL ORDER AND THE RISE OF CHINA

Certainly, the world order is due for a change. If, as Ikenberry argued, "the three components of liberal international order [are] *liberal democracy*,

economic interdependence, and *international institutions*" (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 64), then each of these three pillars may be seriously compromised.

First, several *international institutions* of the liberal world order are in serious trouble. For example, even the institutional architects of post-war liberalism now question its economic underpinnings. The International Monetary Fund, one of the original Bretton Woods institutions, is among those now questioning the wisdom of neoliberalism (Ostry, 2022).

For decades, the United Nations has been all but immobile. This is partly thanks to severe budget constraints (UN Affairs, 2019) and the Security Council's structural deadlock (UN Security Council, 2017), where opposing vetoes make it near-impossible to achieve cooperation. (Indeed, President Obama's (2020) recent memoir, *A Promised Land*, included his opinion that the Security Council's paralysis had contributed to UN member states' failure to "reconstruct failing states like Somalia, or prevent an ethnic slaughter in places like Sri Lanka."

Meanwhile, in apparent response to China's use of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to its advantage—or, perhaps, due to perceptions of the multilateral organization's overreach—the United States continues to cripple the Appellate Body, the highest decision-making body of the WTO (US Trade Representative, 2020). The WTO is the successor to the post–World War II *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade*, a crucial part of Bretton Woods' architecture for global economic integration.

Second, this challenge to liberal international institutions helps to illustrate the ongoing disruption of global *economic interdependence*. China is asserting itself as a global economic power—and as a contender for leadership of the global order. Both China and Russia have publicly proclaimed their allegiance to the concept of a "multipolar world order" in which no single hegemon emerges. Both countries have also engaged directly with the Taliban government of Afghanistan (Devonshire-Ellis, 2022).

So far, China has projected state power through the broad reach of its infrastructure financing and commercial strategy—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), led largely by cooperation between China's state diplomatic strategy and the interests of its state-owned enterprises (Qiong, 2017; Kirchner, 2021). China's rise has prompted a US–China trade war—initiated by President Trump (Brown and Kolb, 2022) in the name of national security interests. In the name of national security, the Biden Administration has continued parts of this policy over Chinese products like neodymium magnets (US Dept. of Commerce, 2021).

While tensions rose, neither side seemed interested in escalating this trade war into a military confrontation. In place of cooperation, however, the US Chamber of Commerce has sounded alarm bells about an economic "decoupling" between the United States and China (China Center, 2021). This feeds

speculation that a "multipolar world" would see regional blocs take precedence over global economic integration.

Investment bank Morgan Stanley's research arm noted that (Morgan Stanley, 2020):

> While it's impossible to make sweeping generalizations about the realities of a broader world order, multipolarity tends to favor companies and sectors whose supply chains are not globally complex and whose products and services don't pose a threat to economic or national security. Even better positioned are companies that could become stronger regional champions, with services key to national interests and perhaps better protected from competitive pressures. Conversely, companies, industries and sectors that have globally integrated supply chains, especially those with technology and health security liabilities, could be increasingly vulnerable to multipolar trade and national or economic security policy trends.

Thus, multipolarity and economic decoupling appear to be linked; both manifest a trend away from globalization and toward regionalization. The possible multipolar world—and, by extension, the possible geoeconomic world order—contains many unforeseen configurations. However, the linkage between economic interests and national security has never been more straightforward than it is today.

Under Ikenberry's rubric, the final pillar of the liberal international order is *liberal democracy*. A state's actions on the world stage are not automatically linked to its domestic policy. But, in our view, nothing about the Trump administration's conduct demonstrated it's inner "will to power" so forcefully as the failed insurrection of January 6, 2021. It is also noteworthy that China's illiberal domestic approach underpins its ability to expand its international reach—for it does business without imposing human rights conditionalities on Belt and Road participant countries (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Liberal democracy is under challenge from populism throughout the Western world. Even in India, the world's largest democracy, its limits have been tested. In states like China, it does not exist.

Thus, to summarize, all three pillars of the liberal international order are under attack, if not yet completely demolished. The United States is deeply introspective about its future and seems skeptical about the merits of foreign intervention. China projects power economically but seemingly has little desire to engage the United States militarily. Russia does not appear to share China's inhibition—daring NATO to act as it plunges Ukraine into potentially long-lasting turmoil. India maintains its long-standing friendship with Russia but engages in diplomacy with Europe.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine points to one route away from liberalism—the return of geopolitics. The global security order could revert into anarchy, with international relations being determined by military capabilities, threats, and the will to carry out those threats. This has been the reality of many Asian, African, and Latin American states at different points since the end of World War II; Europe and North America could experience it again.

The current American approach to Afghanistan, and trade wars between the United States and China, point to an alternative route. A geoeconomic world order could avoid the "Thucydides Trap" (Allison, 2017), the situation where a rising and declining power engages in war to determine their rank. Similarly, India exerts its influence through economic cooperation with Europe, even while it defends Russia's attack on Ukraine. A geoeconomic arrangement of global security is thus one viable candidate to replace the near-moribund liberal international order. If a global system of rules is insufficient to contain tensions between states, then economic competition could fill the role that military brinksmanship once played.

ABOUT THE CHAPTERS OF THIS BOOK

This book brings knowledge, insights, and understanding of why and how the US-led unipolar world order is shifting more in a multipolar direction under the influence of the power contests involving economic and military weaponry and the impact this transformation will have on international security and thus the challenges, crises, and risks that mankind faces.

It offers a systematic exploration of the evolving new (theoretical) positions such as geoeconomics, socioeconomic-political and cultural implications, tensions at the national, regional, and global levels, as well as debates, trends, policies, practices, and examples concerning the power and international relations praxis in the form of cutting-edge articles from scholars and experts with diverse cultural, social, and geographical backgrounds.

It is designed not only for students and teachers of Political Science and International Relations but also for all those interested in politics and current affairs wanting to know how power competition between states and relations between them condition their security in the Asian region.

The volume is divided into the following five sections:

Part I: The Rise of China and the Power Struggle in Asia

China's strategic position in the Eurasian landmass, its gigantic conventional military force, its growth as the world's second largest economic power, and its nuclear arsenal capacity have made China a major power heavily

influencing the changing global security order. Knowledge about China's capabilities is essential to understand the changing dynamics of global security. Part one of this book consists of four chapters highlighting how China's rise challenges the neoliberal, post–Cold War order in several ways as it seeks to reshape its sphere of influence in Asia. The first chapter, which follows this introduction, written by *John Miglietta*, examines Central Asia in international politics and geopolitics in international relations, as well as the history of the region in modern times and its incorporation as part of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union. The region's political dynamics are discussed with emphasis on political changes in Kyrgyzstan and the civil war in Tajikistan. The foreign policies of China, Russia, and the United States, as well as mid-level power in the region, are examined. The energy sources and the environmental implications of the Soviet period are examined, focusing on the Aral Sea and nuclear testing in Kazakhstan. The second chapter, authored by *Lorenzo Fiorito*, analyzes the nexus between geoeconomics, sovereign debt, and state sovereignty through a case study of the China-Sri Lanka Colombo Port City Project. This chapter shows that the Colombo Port City project displays a hybridity between two traditionally competing frameworks: geopolitics and international economic law. The logic behind the proposed Port City thus embodies what this chapter interprets as the "geoeconomic world order." The third chapter, coauthored by *Rajib Timalsina and Indivar Paudel* analyze the announced agendas, activities, and recent initiatives of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), particularly aiming at unpacking the implications—economic, political, strategic and regional—of this endeavor by the major and rising world powers. This chapter places special attention on China, an influential player in South Asia, and its BRI to understand whether the agendas of QUAD are motivated at countering China and BRI or to gain the national-multilateral interest of these four nations in securing a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient. Probable benefits to the nations in the region and the possibility of great power rivalry and polarization in the region are discussed to demystify what QUAD holds for South Asia. The fourth chapter by *Muamer Hirkić*, *examines* China's position in the Western-led order and involvement in global flows, its place in the so-called "Asian century" and the "post–American world," as well as the consequences of its actions on the neighboring countries and the US-dominated world.

Part II: The Changing Nature of Warfare and Weaponry

The use of Private Military Company (PMC) and military drones in wars, the freezing of foreign reserves, and the ever-increasing arms race between superpowers directly impact the changing global security. These realist

approaches to security pose a threat to the liberal order as they treat national security as a zero-sum game. This part comprises five chapters, aiming to discuss these security issues in detail. The fifth chapter by *Ushmayo Bhattacharya* leverages Strategic culture as the prism of analysis to draw out the stagnancy of scholarship on understandings of security in the new millennium. It draws from the argument of Edward Lock, of the Second Generation of Strategic Culture theorists, which aims to problematize the taken-for-granted status that states have enjoyed in their erstwhile understandings of security and to give agency to other upcoming actors within the domain of security; namely the PMC, an enterprise that is becoming increasingly instrumental in international conflicts all over the world. The sixth chapter by *Ghazala Yasmin Jalil* focuses on the emerging US–Russia arms race, the US–China rivalry, and their implications for global security. It also discusses how the global arms races would impact regional races/competitions like India–Pakistan. The seventh chapter of *Hafssa Fakher Elabiari* brings to light the impact of military drone possession on power and risk-taking behavior in war-torn countries. Using the case study of Turkish and Emirati drones in Libya between 2019 and 2020, the chapter scrutinizes how the possession of military drones inflates a country's power and appetite for risk and erases the operational barriers linked to foreign intervention, thus creating an encouraging environment for reckless moves and clash durability. The eighth chapter, contributed by *Michael Larrick* explains how domestic issues can drive international and domestic security policy. He uses the executive order issued by the US government on February 11, 2022, to block the foreign reserves of Afghanistan's Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) as a case study to explain this proposition. As he argues, through one lens, this announcement and following order was a continuation, if the escalation, of a long-standing US policy to leverage its position as a nexus of global finance to pursue national security interests, and through another lens, this announced a marked departure from previous exercises, expropriating another country's assets with no due process and having little pretense of legality either domestically or internationally. The ninth chapter by *Aslam Khan* examines the implications of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan on the global order, focusing on realist theory. On the one hand, this chapter argues that while jihadist elements around the world see the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan as a victory, it has provided motivation for their future endeavors, and on the other hand, it has weakened the US's position in the global order and surrendered Afghanistan to actors with whom America has fought for decades. This chapter focuses on how this withdrawal has led China and Pakistan to act on an axis and how Pakistan's alignment with the Taliban has created a setback for India.

Part III: Sociological Approaches to Conflicts and Security

The role of social factors in conditioning the changing global security order and proposing solutions to the tensions and concerns is extremely important. The three chapters included in this section focus on how win–win solution-oriented and people-centered cooperation and collaboration can address security threats and lead to peace. *Iqbal Shailo*, in the tenth chapter, advocates for an "Organic Regional Security Model" (ORSM) in the South Asian region as an alternative security framework to construct collective identity, regional solidarity, and mutual trust. A South Asian security concept would be premature if imposed or constructed by other (outsiders/super) powers. This chapter places its main emphasis on security integration approaches to put forward an argument for an ORSM in the South Asian region as an alternative security paradigm to build collective identity, regional solidarity, and mutual trust. The eleventh chapter by *Siavash Chavoshi and Mohammad Reza Saeidabadi*, opens up a nonmaterialistic interpretation of states' provocative and conflict-seeking behavior through misrecognition, ontological insecurity, and the role of historical trauma in constructing states' conflictual behavior in a Hegelian fashion. This chapter interprets state conflict-seeking behaviors by the actors' desire for recognition and ontological security through the master and slave dialectic. It embarks on a qualitative study of a single case, focusing on the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy choices by mainly focusing on two historical traumas in Iran: the US/British coup of 1953 against Prime Minister Mossadegh and also the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear agreement formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The twelfth chapter of *Mehmet Babacan* focuses on the political, social, economic, and other structural reasons for the ongoing crises by highlighting the current situation and conflicts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region within the scope of the Arab Spring wave. Current problems of the MENA region in the context of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, which were affected by the Arab Spring, and its relationship with the social and economic structure of the Middle East are also discussed in this chapter.

Part IV: Coercion, Culture, and Environment in International Relations

Beyond the proliferation of destructive weapons between countries, various coercive strategies, cultural influence on political decision-making and political behavior, and the environment as an on-traditional security issue are increasingly important factors influencing the changing global security order. Three chapters included in this part concentrate on how these three factors relate to the evolving security order. In light of the Iranian nuclear crisis, the thirteenth chapter by *Jean Yves Ndzana Ndzana*, analyzes the notion

of coercion in international relations, its nature, its forms, and its different mechanisms. Further, this chapter examines the various coercive strategies adopted by the US administration to compel the Iranian republic government under Ahmadinejad to reverse its nuclear programme. The fourteenth chapter by *Tamta Tskhovrebadze*, aims to depict different approaches toward cultural policies in international relations, identify convergence and disparities, especially while yoked to the "soft power" concept, and better understand the complexity of cultural policies in different national and international contexts. This chapter suggests rethinking cultural imperialism and resistance as an increasingly acute trend for countries with strong anti-hegemonic or self-hegemonic aspirations. Its focus on contemporary issues in international relations is maintained from the glances of disparities between cultural understandings, aspirations of states toward its relevance to contemporary political behaviors, and interest-based decisions making patterns. The fifteenth chapter, authored by *Adriano Mortada*, sheds light on the importance of addressing water security, which has emerged as an essential concept that encapsulates several objectives for managing water resources. It is increasingly gaining attention throughout global debates and agendas proposed by governments and international organizations. This chapter identifies the key challenges related to water security, followed by an in-depth analysis of the main issues.

Part V: Effects of Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Order

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the realpolitik of global health security. Global COVID-19 vaccine diplomatic efforts have revealed several bitter truths about international relations and resonated with the changing and complex global security realities. Two chapters are included in this final section to understand what dimension the COVID-19 pandemic is creating for the changing global security order. The sixteenth chapter by *Paulina Kanarek* aims to analyze the motivations behind China's mask diplomacy by uncovering the long-term foreign policy goals in selected regions. This chapter answers the following research questions through empirical investigation: Why is Chinese mask diplomacy a success in some places and a failure in others? What factors determine its effectiveness? An in-depth analysis of the contrasting attitudes toward China in Europe and Latin America sheds light on the future of the BRI in the post–COVID-19 world. The seventeeth chapter, written by *Maheen Farhat Raza and Muhammad Ali Raza*, explores the trajectory of militant organizations in the wake of COVID-19. This chapter grounds its argument on the assertion made in the Global Terrorism Index report, which found an increase in far-right violent maneuvers when

compared to other forms of violent extremism, and at the same time, attempts to elaborate on the factors that motivate far-right groups to engage in violence.

The conclusion chapter by *Lorenzo Fiorito*, *Senthan Selvarajah*, *and Nesrin Kenar* highlights the book's argument that the global security order is changing due to the tension between a rules-based liberal international order and a world order characterized by power contests involving economic and military weaponry and underlines how each chapter in this book supports this hypothesis.

NOTES

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Chapter 12

Socioeconomic Dynamics Fostering Antidemocratic Regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

Ongoing Wars, Contemporary Issues, and Humanitarian Crises

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INTRODUCTION

As a part of the earth, a geographical region may mean more than a territory for humanity and history. The most suitable example of this situation is precisely the "Middle East" region. The international community almost daily talks about events or crises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Today, all global powers have a particular agenda for this region. We must remember some historical conflicts between regional and global powers for the hegemony of the Middle East. Since the age of the Industrial Revolution, this region has occupied an indispensable geoeconomic and geopolitics role for Western countries. After the First World War, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Caliphate, Britain, and France were the region's dominant power (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016). Then with the end of the Second World War, countries in this region lived the effects of the "*Cold War*" (1945–1991) very strongly and heatedly. Nearly all worldwide crises during the Cold War occurred in the Middle East; *U-2 Crisis, Syrian Crisis, Suez Canall Crisis, 1973-OPEC Crisis, Invasion of Aphganistan and Kuwait War* . . . . At the same time, this region has *Mesopotamia*, where the first human communities were seen in history, and the first agricultural activities were carried out. The MENA region can be worked in various disciplines with other dimensions. Still, we can emphasize its political and social structure in recent years, especially during and after the *Arab Spring* revolutions, with

the context of the main rules of international relations, foreign policy, and political science.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: "DEMOCRACY," "MIDDLE EAST," AND "SOCIAL STRUCTURE"

In recent years when we look at the books and articles that have been published about the Middle East region, generally, we see that they are focused on permanent instability, domestic wars, crises, and political, social, and economic disorder in countries with realist and/or neorealist perspectives (Danahar, 2015). Arguments about this situation generally unite on two points: (a) after the Arab-spring lots of crises and new failure states occurred, and security-based analyses have increased, (b) the region (the Middle East or MENA) is still a zone for world hegemony efforts between super/hyperpower as it happened in the past (e.g., Cold War).

Before moving on to the current unstable state of the Middle East region, we need to assess the reasons and processes that lead to this situation. The waves of the Arab Spring revolution still surround the Middle East. It is remembered with the internal conflicts, civil wars, and crises in this process as Libya, Syria, and Yemen. It has been stated that from the past to the present that democratization is a process that requires skill for the whole MENA region (Schmitter and Karl, 1991: 71–88). When we examine the views put forward about the reasons for this, the patriarchal, which is based on racial ethnicity, tribe, or sect, which we can call "*neo-patrimonial*," to consolidate the political authority of the Middle Eastern countries immediately after gaining their independence, they are determined to be a demand for the management with their social structure (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990).

The perspective that tries to explain the basis of the democracy debates in Middle Eastern countries by reducing the phenomenon of religion and cultural difference, and the *Orientalist* approach that includes theorists and authors such as Daniel Pipes, Samuel Huntington, and Eli Khedourie, is an opinion he adopts (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991: 427–440). As a reflection of this view, the rhetoric of Arab or Middle Eastern "*exceptionalism*" has been born in the literature on the Middle East. Therefore, it has been suggested that the social culture in the region is incompatible with liberal values, so an institutional democratic political system cannot be dominant in the region (Crystal, 1994).

However, since 2011, starting from Tunisia with a domino effect, the popular movements that have influenced the entire MENA geography have partially invalidated this rhetoric and demonstrated that democratic values could also spread in these countries with the dynamism of collective popular movements. As a general name given to the popular movements or uprisings that started to be seen in 2011, the "*Arab Spring*" was perceived by the rest of the world as the wave of democracy in which authoritarian regimes would collapse in this region and the Arab world of about 400 million would undergo a radical transformation. Indeed, while talking about *Arab exceptionalism* in the Middle East region, which is foreign to the liberal and democratic values system represented by the West and relatively late, the collective dynamism it demonstrated by the peoples of the region ruled by authoritarian regimes for years paved the way for the wave of democratization to spread in Arab societies.Huntington explains the process of democracy with the principle that an unelected government is replaced by a new, freely and honestly elected government and mentions the existence of waves of democratization in world history affecting political systems. According to Huntington, the first of the waves of democratization in the world that faced adverse waves was the United States (US) presidential elections in 1828, which were fed by the American and French revolutions, and the increasing spread of democratic-style elections and the governments in the world created. The second represents the process of *decolonization* with the end of the Second World War. The third wave of democratization follows the end of the Portuguese dictatorship (*Salazar regime*) in 1974 and the process of replacing authoritarian regimes in about thirty countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America with democratic regimes (Huntington, 1991).

Referring to Huntington's *democratization waves theory*, it has been suggested that the popular uprisings seen in the MENA in 2011 were the fourth of these great waves. The presentation of the Arab Spring uprisings as the last wave of democratization demolished the dominance of the Arab or Middle Eastern exceptionalism discourse on the Middle East region for years. In addition, this situation has shaken the position and ideology of the Orientalist movement toward Middle Eastern countries. Also, Edward Said criticizes the idea of *Orientalism* that the region's political, cultural, and social structure and Islam, which is the dominant belief in the region, contradict democratic values (Said, 1988). The wave of the Arab Spring, in which the educated and urban youth with information and communication technologies are the locomotive, especially in countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain, brought their demands to the regional and global agenda.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (*MENA*) REGION: *ARAB SPRING* AND REGIMES (CHANGING AND UNCHANGING REGIMES, OTORITERISM AND COUNTER-REVOLUTIONS)

As mentioned above, with the popular uprisings called the Arab Spring countries in the MENA, more demands on social justice, economic opportunities, and political freedoms have been brought to the agenda. Popular uprisings in Tunisia, where Mohammed Bouazizi, who constituted the beginning and the point of the inspiration of the Arab Spring wave, carried out the act of burning himself, actually coincides with the last months of 2010 (Yüksel and Bingöl, 2013: 315).The uprisings that turned into mass movements with the action of Bouazizi are not a phenomenon that occurs suddenly and reflects the expression that chronic problems that have developed over many years have become unbearable in society. Chronic problems, which are closely related to the social-economic and demographic structures of the Arab countries, especially in the last fifty years, are better understood when analyzed with some triggers. The rapid population growth in these countries in the MENA, the excess of young population, the deep feeling of unemployment and poverty among the public, dissatisfaction with justice services, the effects of fundamentalist movements, welfare, the high increase in food prices especially in 2010 and 2011, nepotism, lack of democracy, the persecution of autocratic oppressive regimes for years, complaints about low living standards they have been the primary triggers that ignited the popular movements (Idris, 2016). As a result of these uprisings, which were called the Arab Spring concerning the "*Prague Spring*" of 1968, the dictatorships that had ruled for many years, especially in Egypt and Libya, were destroyed. Still, the process was more difficult in Syria and Yemen.

As a result of the "*Jasmine Revolution*" that started in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, Zeinel-Abidin bin Ali, who ruled the country for twenty-three years, left the Presidency and his country on January 14, 2011. In the elections held afterward, the en-Nahda Party led by Rashid Gannushi, known to have ideological affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, won the majority in the parliament by taking 40% of the votes (AlJazeera, 2015). Millions of people who rebelled against the 30-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, where popular uprisings after Tunisia focused on the "*day of anger*" on January 25, 2011, filled Tahrir Square, and they demonstrated their reactions to unemployment, poverty, and political pressure. The ongoing internal turmoil in the country didn't stop despite the election of Mohammed Morsi as president on June 30, 2012, and the approval of the new constitution. Finally, with a military coup on July 3, 2013, the army took over the administration, and General Abdolfettah al-Sisi announced that Morsi was removed

from his post. Following the constitutional amendment made in 2014 and the victory of General Sisi in the presidential election held in the same year, Morsi and many members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested and tried (Trager, 2015).

In Libya, where the public uprisings and events started on February 17, 2011, simultaneously with Egypt, the Western countries led by the United States of America (USA), Britain, and France followed a different policy. After the events in this country, NATO's air, land, and sea elements intervened on March 19. Moammar Gaddafi was caught and killed in Sirte on March 20, symbolizing a new era that began in Libya, where 30,000 people lost their lives. Today the country is divided into two due to the authority dispute between the Government of National Consensus, recognized by the United Nations (UN), and the warrior General Caliph Khafter and the social and economic life in the country has been paralyzed. Peaceful negotiations between both parties continue at international platforms led by the UN and European Union (EU). However, it should be said that after the overthrow of the dictator Gaddafi, Libya could not attain a real environment of peace and democracy as hoped (Winer, 2019).

And in Yemen, after the collapse of the national authority, the power vacuum is tried to be filled by local actors. Moreover, the use of these sectarian actors to eat by their neighboring two countries or regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, constitutes the basis of the Yemeni Crisis. The main factor that makes Yemeni a regional security threat and crisis for the Middle East today is Houthi rebels against Mansour Al-Hadi, elected president in 2012 after Ali Abdullah Saleh, who founded a semi-authoritarian government in 1990, left his position. The Houthis, supported by Iran since the beginning, took over the administration in early 2015 and signed agreements with Iran in many areas, including oil, aviation, electricity, and maritime transport (Reuters, 2014). The expansionism of Iran, which is trying to expel the Shiite regime in the region, and its influence in Yemen prompted the Sunni bloc and Saudi Aarabian-led Arab League Members (Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and Morocco) have taken a military operation named "*Storm of Determination*" against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Despite the United States' support for this military operation and providing logistical assistance, the Houthi rebels still dominate Yemen (Exum, 2017).

The demonstrations in Syria, which constitute one of the hardest and deepest links of the Arab Spring wave, started in March 2010 after four people were killed by the security forces in the city of Dera. The protests that started with democratic public demands gradually gained political content, and influenced by examples such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, they turned to the Bashar al-Assad regime. The security forces' response to the demonstrators by firing heavy weapons caused the events to escalate, turn into a civil war, and turn

the international community's attention there. The reaction against the Assad regime in Syria has become a regional and global crisis beyond an internal war. As a result of the civil war in Syria, 60% of the country's population has become refugees, and 11 million Syrians have needed humanitarian aid in the last ten years (Domazeti, 2020). In addition, the people of Syria and bordering countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have fallen to European refugee status. Besides , on August 21, 2013, approximately 1400 people lost their lives as a reult of the chmeical weapons attack in Eastern Ghouta. This was a truly brutal crime against humanity committed by the Assad regime. Today, it is cınsidered almost impossible organizing a military international operation against Syria. In addition to the existence of terrorist organizations such as ISIS (*Islamic State of Iraq and Syria*) and PKK/YPG (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/ Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)* in Syria ,the political authority is fragmented. With these terrorist organizations, Turkey, Iran and Russia also have military bases and forces in the country. Despite all this, the Bashar al-Assad regime resists leaving power and continues the civil massacres (Orhan, 2020).

In conclusion, we can say that; as a result of the widespread public uprisings seen in countries in the MENA geography since 2011 and the revolution called Arab Spring, the existing administrations were changed in countries such as Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia, in countries such as Syria, political systems and rulers continued their existence. During the Arab Spring, authoritarian regimes also showed the ability to adapt to new processes, learning from the Arab Spring protests (Heydemann and Leenders, 2011: 647–653).

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF THE MENA REGION

The "Middle East" concept is artificial and a political geography term created for political purposes. Today's region, the Middle East, has a broad meaning of the lands extending from the Atlantic coast to India's Ganges river basin. The term Middle East was first used in history in 1902 by Alfred Thayer Mahan. After that, it is more broadly expressed by Valentino Chirol as the region covering all countries and territories on the road to the Indian colonies (Chirol, 1903). It is also argued that the concept of the Middle East originates from the name of the "*Middle Eastern Commmandership*" that Britain gave to its military units during the Second World War (Davison, 1960).

The Middle East region is more than just the name of a geographical region on earth, where the first agricultural activities were carried out on the fertile Mesopotamian lands where civilizations were born and where all three monolithic religions were born and developed is there. The city of *Jerusalem*, which is considered sacred for these three religions, is in this region. In addition to

religious and historical elements, the region is rich in energy resources, containing 60% of the world's petroleum reserves and approximately 50% of natural gas reserves. It also has strategically important seaways, straits, and passages such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Aden, the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Suez Canal. The Middle East is a region where significant developments and changes have taken place that affect world history, except for the Industrial Revolution (Payind and McClimans, 2017: 8–9).

The region has been open to influence and intervention throughout history and has been the center of conflict and competition. One of the sources of conflict and competition in the region is the region's internal dynamics. Although the dominant belief of the region is Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are also mentioned as other active religions in the region. Ethically, it should be noted that besides Turkish, Arab, and Persian identities, Kurds and Jews also play an important role in the region. From the past to the present, there have been many conflicts stemming from the internal ethnic, religious, sectarian, and political dynamics of the region, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Shiite-Sunni conflict, and the Ikhwan-Salafist struggle. Again, the economic structure in the region includes countries that differ greatly from each other depending on the form of political organization (Bates and Rassam, 1996). Firstly, there are "*rentier state*" countries whose economy is largely based on producing and selling natural resources (oil and gas); on the other hand, there are other countries with scarce resources. The economic and political organization in the region has a great impact on the social structure, such as religion, sect, and ethnicity. For example, in Egypt, where the per capita income is $3,000, some people rebelled within the scope of the Arab Spring due to unemployment, poverty, and other economic problems, while Saudi Arabia affiliated with the Palace bureaucracy, bribes and thanks to its neo-patrimonial rule, it freed itself from the effects of the Arab Spring (Kaldas, 2020).

Religion and Sectarian Issues

Religion has an important determinant role in the Middle East's current political issues and social and socioeconomic structure. In addition to the fact that the origins of *Christianity, Islam*, and *Judaism*, which are three important monolithic religions, are in this region, the fact that the prophets who preached these religions to the people were the first to declare their beliefs in the Middle East region also carries the subject to the historical dimension of theology and religions. With the three monolithic religions, the presence of other Middle East-centered minority religions, such as *Yazidism* and *Zoroastrianism*, shows the importance of the phenomenon of religion for the Middle East in every field. Although there are different races, languages, and religions in the Middle East, Middle Eastern states, countries, nations, and religions also differ. For example, there is not a single sect among the

countries of the region regarding Islam, which is the dominant religion of the region, and there is a division into different sects (Halliday, 2005: 9).

The deepening of these sectarian differences in a way that reveals their own beliefs and identities by the states that exist in the region expands and strengthens the potential conflict areas in the Middle East. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is the most important example that can be given in this regard, has turned the sectarian separation in the region into a regional leadership struggle in the situation. Today, Iran's support for Shiite militias in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen is faced with strong opposition from the Sunni bloc in the region, especially from Saudi Arabia. While religions and sects shaped and gave identity to many Arab states in the Middle East, they gave the Jewish State identity by shaping it in the state of Israel, which was established in 1948. At the birth of Israel, as a spatial geopolitical discourse, has an important potential in the process of building the identity of both the state, the nation, and the society (Lee, 2014: 81). Since 1948, Palestine, which is in dispute with the Jewish State over the same religious places and sanctuaries, claims its religious perception especially on Jerusalem and to be effective in a way to highlight its religious belief works.

Despite having the same religious beliefs, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which are in regional competition over sectarian differences, are also based on a sectarian separation between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and an understanding of Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) polarization can be mentioned. Therefore, while religion in the Middle East is often a source of legitimacy for political systems, it is often used extensively as a means of influencing other states and gaining influence over the region. This situation also leads to effects and conflicts that transcend the nation-state's borders (Razi, 1990).

Social Structure: Tribes and Ethnical Problems

It has a mosaic-like appearance regarding Middle Eastern national and ethnic identities and religions. Contrary to popular belief, the region is not a homogeneous structure; it is the living space of ethnic groups such as *Turkish, Arab, Persian, Kurdish, Armenian, Jewish*, and *Assyrian*, showing a heterogeneous character. *Turks, Arabs*, and *Persians*, the dominant ethnic elements in the region, emerged as the most important determinant of ethnicity in shaping the region in terms of civilization and history. However, it should be noted that *Kurds, Armenians*, and *Jews* are also ethnic groups that played an important role in shaping the region. Besides, there are many other ethnic minorities in every country. Kurds, for example, live significantly in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, similar to Turkmen in Iraq. Besides, again in certain parts of Iran, it is known that Arab minorities exist. According to views based on historical reasons for the reasons of ethnic problems in the Middle East,

the drawing of the borders of the countries by the imperialist powers in a way that does not conform to the nation-state logic after the First World War is the biggest factor that causes the conflicts. While the existing borders of the countries in the region were drawn arbitrarily by the Western states; as a result, divided societies that did not feel belonging to the state they lived in (Lu and Thies, 2013).

Ethnic diversity in the region and ethnic minorities within countries have created many conflicts, crises, and wars in the historical process. For example, Saddam Hussein used chemical poisonous gas against Kurdish minorities in the incident known as the *Halabja Massacre* in 1988, citing the uprisings of the Kurds in his country as an excuse. Before the war with Iraq (1980–1988), Iran claimed that the Arab minorities in his region, Khuzestan, were provoked by other Arab states, Iraq. And we know that since 1985 an armed rebellion (PKK) in Turkey has had a Kurdish minority. And a low-intensity war is taking place in the East and Southeast of the country (Gunes and Zeydanlıoglu, 2015).

Ethnic identities were as important as religious identities in the formation of the modern Middle East born. As an example, Saddam Hussein gave special importance to Arabs and Sunnis, who are minorities among Arabs, and even their countrymen (*Tıkrîtîs*), in his administration in Iraq. Similarly, while the Assad regime ensured the dominance of the minority ethnic identity of Syria against the Sunnis in the majority, the presence of local *Bedouin* elements supporting the Hashemite regime in Jordan is an example. In addition, the tribes that have held trade in Saudi Arabia for many years provide financial support to Ibn Saud to control the *Nejd* and *Hejaz* region during the establishment of the Saudi state, and these tribes are in a privileged position in the future it has enabled it to take place (Boulby, 2013).

The ethnic divisions that exist in countries in the Middle East have sometimes deepened as divisions that have the potential to return to conflict. Especially in the postcolonial period, powerful local families and tribes who held power saw the regime's interests that represented them as superior to the national interests. While this situation has created great dissatisfaction in the public base and affected social structure negatively over the years, the most appropriate examples of this can be seen in the thirty yearly Mubarak regime in Egypt and the Assad family, who are still active in Syria (Boulby, 2013).

Economic Structure

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, economically diverse countries and systems emerged in the Middle East. Effective colonial administrations in the region, especially France and Britain, gave more importance to politics in this region than the economy, and the

countries in the region have ruled that their currencies are valid. This situation caused the extinguished countries to suffer great economic damage. In addition, another factor affecting the state structures and economic systems of the Middle Eastern countries is the Petroleum Concession agreements they signed with foreign powers, which represent indirect exploitation. For example, the concession first signed in Iran in 1901 is a prime example. Despite the reactions of the public, this situation in Iran continued until 1979, when the nationalization efforts of the Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Musaddıq were interrupted by the *Ajax Operation* (Gelvin, 194).

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries (UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, etc.), whose economy is mainly dependent on oil revenues and has the status of a *rentier state* in the region. These countries suffer more than other states in the event of an unexpected drop in oil prices and their economic incomes is fall sharply. This situation also accelerates social and political changes in the mentioned countries. The primary incomes of other states that do not have the status of a rentier state in the region and do not have petroleum incomes, except for natural resources, are foreign aids, agricultural incomes, small enterprises, and foreign exchange brought to take the country by the labor force working outside the country. For example, non-rentier states such as Jordan and Lebanon consistently receive foreign economic aid from actors inside and outside the region, as they do not have oil but are strategically and geopolitically important. However, this situation makes the domestic and foreign policies of these non-rentier states, which are defined as weak or small countries, open to the intervention of other actors and makes them their potential domain. This dependency relationship causes weak states to pursue an independent foreign policy rather than eliminate external factors (Sorli, Gleditcsh, and Strand, 2015: 147).

Military-Policy Relations

In the context of military-political relations, it can be said that the army has a determining role in the political systems of countries in the Middle East with authoritarian regimes. The fact that the army has an active role in the modernization process and that a large part of the income is devoted to defense expenditures reveals that domestic politics cannot be considered separately from a military organization. The new states established in the Middle East, especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, needed a strong army and charismatic leaders to build a strong central administration. Military coups in the Middle East came into force with the coup of Bekir Sıdkı in Iraq in 1936 for the first time in the Middle East in the postcolonial period. Saddam Hussein, who had an important place in the political life of Iraq, placed the army at the center of the state apparatus with

his defense expenditures besides bringing the Baas party to the forefront. However, Egypt is the best example of the army's role in society and state life in the Middle East. The transformative and modernizing influence of the army on society in Egypt has a long history dating back to the Ottoman Empire. Nasser seized the Egyptian administration in 1952 and, after Britain withdrew from the Suez Canal in 1954, started to increase the number of police and security forces. The army's role in Egypt was understood more closely during the Arab Spring period, and the Supreme Military Council took over the administration after Hosni Mubarak left his position. It should be said that Abdulfettah al-Sisi, who currently rules Egypt, is a General, and the country is a military dictatorship based on military rule.

Shortly, we can say that military-political relations play an important role in the political life of the states in the Middle East, that the army intervened in the state life with coups and played an important role in suppressing the internal turmoil and opposition in the country (McNabb, 2017).

ONGOING WARS AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The MENA region have not survived the trauma of the Arab Spring, although ten years have passed. Today, the ongoing civil war and conflict environment in Libya, Syria, and Yemen has completely turned into a global crisis. Many global and regional actors actively participated in these crises and implemented a proxy war strategy. While the social, political, and economic life in these countries, where many terrorist organizations have emerged, has gradually deteriorated, people in these countries need humanitarian aid regarding food, economy, and health. Especially Syria and Yemen is a humanitarian crisis, and the people in these countries are hungry. In addition to all these, the COVID-19 global epidemic/pandemic, which started to emerge in 2019, seriously threatens the lives of the people of these countries under adverse health conditions. Furthermore, the regime change in these countries has not been fully realized, a well-functioning democracy has not yet been established, and economic and social life has not been settled (Middle East Institute, 2021).

It is a practice of proxy and attrition war in which all regional and global actors, large and small, take part in Syria today. To fulfill the functions of nation-states, especially after the Arab Spring, due to the extreme volatility of sectarian and regional alliances in line with strategic interests and the gradual weakening of existing nation-states, non-state actors emerged that got stronger. The leading terrorist organizations, ISIS, the PKK/YPG, and the Shiite-origin Hezbollah, have had an active presence in Syria. The emergence of these terrorist organizations and non-state actors, which are considered to

be in addition to the opponents who are fighting the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, is far from the conditions of a Syrian society that will live in peace and stability. The most important reasons for the survival of the Assad regime, which symbolizes the Nusayri minority, which constitutes 16% of the population, to rule the rest of the society by autocratic methods, are supported by actors such as Iran and Russia, passive engagement of the United States and insufficient efforts of the international community. During the 10-year Syrian Civil War, approximately 14 million people were killed due to the torture of the Assad regime. At the same time, 5.6 million Syrians left their country and became refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and European countries. Approximately 60% of the country's population within the borders of Syria needs humanitarian aid, and hospitals, healthcare buildings, schools, and other important civil society buildings have been demolished during the ongoing civil war (BBC, 2016).

Yemen is the Middle Eastern country where a humanitarian crisis is experienced similar to Syria or even more severe. The political authority gap that emerged after the withdrawal of Ali Abdullah Saleh's administration in Yemen was wanted to be filled by local actors, especially the Houthi tribe belonging to the Zeydî sect. Even Zeydî seized the Capital City of Sana in 2014 and drafted a unilateral constitution. As we explained above, when the semi-authoritarian rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh, supported by Saudi Arabia, collapsed as a result of the Arab Spring uprisings and Shiite supporters started to take effect in the country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is with its Sunni allies organized an air operation to this country together. In this situation in Yemen, while Iran openly supported the Zeydîs/Houthis, such as Nusayris in Syria, Russia demonstrated its support for Iran. On the other hand, the United States went to solidarity with Saudi Arabia and the Sunni bloc (Ghamarai, 2015: 47). But currently, the Joe Biden administration declared in its last statement that it would not support Saudi Arabia over the War in Yemen. While the armed conflicts continue in the country today, the people of Yemen are very dire; without the strength to stand in the face of hunger, poverty, disease, increased infant and child deaths, divided state structure, insufficient infrastructure, and instability draw the table. In Yemen, as in Syria, it is still unknown when the conflicts will end and when stability will be achieved (Pradhan, 2017: 96).

CONCLUSION

The Middle East is a region with an ancient civilization accumulation that has been the source of important developments in human history. This region has been the center of a global struggle throughout history due to its geopolitical

location and energy resources. The competition to gain dominance in this region has affected the region's stability in all periods. At the same time, the regional leadership struggles of the states in the region have been mentioned. This geography, which has an important and special position in terms of religious, historical, economic, and geopolitical, remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for approximately 400 years; after the First World War, Britain and France established a mandate regime in the region. After the Second World War, the region, subject to the USSR and US's global competition, came to the agenda with the waves of social and political revolution called the *Arab Spring*, which started in 2011 after the Cold War. Authoritarian and antidemocratic regimes have generally dominated countries in the Middle East region for years. This is the main reason that started the popular uprisings. However, the ethnic diversity and religious minorities in every country in the MENA region, the frequent intervention of the army in politics, and the unstable economic structure are other important factors that reveal the popular movements. For example, the anger felt by the Sunnis, who make up about 70% of the population in Syria, against the oppressive regime of the minority Nusayri or the reaction of the people in Egypt to the economic inadequacies can be read from this perspective. In addition, the pressure of the Quaddafi tribe, to which leader Muammar Gaddafi belongs, on other tribes in Libya has been the reason for the popular uprisings in Libya. This collective public dynamism has also transformed the culturalist and orientalist literature, stating that democracy cannot rule over the region's people. However, the number of revolutions that have been successful in the current period is few, and the current situation resembles more of a winter than spring.

The ongoing civil war and conflict, especially in Syria and Yemen, has become a global humanitarian crisis. The war environment in Syria and Yemen continues due to the inability of local actors, supported by global and regional actors, to overpower each other. Besides proxy actors and proxy wars, the emergence of terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Hezbollah, PKK/YPG, and Al-Qaeda in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen further destabilized these countries. The countries in the region have used religious and ethnic minorities among each other for their strategic purposes and tried to create a sphere of influence. This situation continues during and after the Arab Spring.

NOTE

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