

## **US Strategy towards Islamic Awakening**

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### **Abstract**

*The Islamic awakening evolutions in the Middle East have changed the regional discipline in different aspects and affected the policies of regional and trans-regional actors since 2011. Meanwhile, the USA, which defined widespread interest in the region since the Second World War, encountered with the worst crisis than any other state. The present study investigated the USA interests in the Middle East and tested the effects of Islamic awakening on these interests. The main question of this study was the interaction and strategy of the USA in the Middle East for Islamic awakening. The result of this study indicated that the USA has put the measures such as direct military intervention and apparent changes in the ruling elite on its agenda to manage the military presence in the region and target countries, avoid reliance on one union, promote the secular Islamist model, have proximity to civil society and Islamists in the region, strengthen the human rights discourse and advance the process of reconciliation, and manage the challenges posed by the rise of Islamic awakening in the region in the long term.*

### **Keywords**

*Islamic Awakening, the USA, Middle East, Islam, Foreign Policy*

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## **Introduction**

The regional revolutions which occurred due to various causes including the crisis of legitimacy, inefficiency and dominance of the Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa, have made the people of these countries to rise against the identity crisis imposed by the rulers and the trans-regional countries. In addition to different studies in the field of domestic politics, such evolutions affected the regional and trans-regional actors. The USA is one of the most trans-regional actors involved in such trends. A large part of the USA foreign policy during the Cold War focused on the Middle East and its evolutions. The wide-spread relationship between the country and the countries of the region in various aspects throughout history has created widespread interests, so that any change in the balance of power and regional order can affect these interests. Regarding this problem, the present article examined the impact of the USA interest in the Middle East through evolutions related to Islamic awakening.

### **1. Islamic Awakening and the US Middle East Interests**

Considering the USA interest in the region, the effects of such developments and revolutions in the region on these interests are studied.

#### **1-1. Islamic Awakening and Ensuring Energy Security**

As stated above, ensuring energy and continuing the Middle East energy flow to other parts of the world was defined as one of the vital interests of the USA in the region. Accordingly, the USA played the role of a gendarme to protect such an interest for itself

and its allies. Revolutionary developments in the Middle East and Persian Gulf had a direct impact on this role and interest. Since a significant amount of oil in the world passes through the three Strait of Hormuz, Bab Al-Mundab and the Suez Canal, any unrest in these geographic areas will have a significant impact on the rise in energy prices. The most immediate effect is the rise in oil prices due to unrest in producing countries. The world energy market has always been a concern for major consumers, including the USA in the world's economic downturn. Instability in the countries of the region has aggravated the price of oil, although the West has been trying to manage production by the allies such as Saudi Arabia while it cost a lot in the long term resulting in many problems. In recent evolutions, 10 to 15 percent increase was observed in energy prices in the world (Blas 2011).

In the longer term, the need to oil in Iran and Iraq will increase in the USA and the West causing negative economic consequences for the USA due to its problems especially with Iran. On the other hand, the rise of tensions between Iran and the conservative Arab countries which are the old allies of the USA will increase the energy prices as a result of regional revolutions. In addition, the conflict between Saudi Arabia interests than the evolutions in Bahrain and Egypt has led to its tension with countries in the region such as Iran and other Persian Gulf countries which indirectly affects the USA interests. The West and USA economic problems and their growing need to energy will cause catastrophic price growth to them resulting in their deep recession. On the other hand, the loss of oil-rich countries by revolutionary changes s another catastrophe endangering the immediate and vital interests of the USA in the long run (TerrillShare 2011).

## **1-2. Islamic Awakening and Ensuring the Israel's Security**

Undoubtedly, the regional revolutions will have a serious impact on Israel's strategic policy and status due to their Islamic nature. Since supporting Israel is one of the vital interests of the USA in the region, it will have an impact on the policies of this country. The Islamic awakening in the region has changed the strategic environment of Israel and considering the security issues were on the agenda of its policies. In recent years, although security has been a major concern for Israeli leaders, with regard to peace accords with some Arab countries and definitive and de facto identification of this regime by its Arab neighbors, security was not a major concern for Israel while the most attention has been paid to political issues, peace talks, and internal problems. With the advent of these evolutions, the security of the regime has become even more important for its leaders, and from this point of view there was a reversal of interest (Darwish 2012: 90-95).

On the other hand, the evolutions in the region's revolutions have caused the domestic undesirable conditions of Israel to be considered more seriously by the people of this regime and resulting in widespread protests. Adverse economic conditions, corruption, government support from settlements, reduced job opportunities and educational opportunities, undermining of civil and democratic institutions, widening the gaps between the middle and upper middle classes caused massive dissatisfaction with the Israeli government within the occupied territories and the direct result of these protests will weaken the government. The coincidences of these protests with what is happening in the Arab world illustrate the effectiveness of the Israeli society from the evolutions in the

region and part of the Israeli problems associated with the Islamic awakening is related to these perspectives in the Israeli society. On the other hand, the injection of the Islamic awakening into the Palestinian people has strengthened the jihadi approach and their resistance, in such a way that Israel considered these intensified protests as a threat to existence and strongly suppressed it.

Another impact of the region's evolutions on the USA interests about is the affected peace talks of Israel and Arab countries. With the advent of Obama in the USA, more attention was paid to peace trend based on the tradition of democrats on the Arab-Israel issue which was reinforced by the appointment of the Special Representative of the USA President. The position of Obama's government was peace talks based on the 1967 borders as well as the mutual exchange of land based on mutual agreement focusing on border issues and security. Obama believed that the issue of displaced persons and the issue of Jerusalem should be addressed in the future and after the determination of the abovementioned tasks. Meanwhile, Israel's position was against Obama (Carpenter 2011).

Since the USA is the sole ally and a factor in the progress of Israeli policies in the region, the decline in the USA popularity as a result of evolutions in Arab countries will directly affect the USA and Israeli positions and will weaken the regime. the USA popularity for the Egyptian people is only 5% and for the people of Jordan is 10%; therefore, the USA is pushing Israel to reach the outcome of the peace process faster, because the delay in this process and the deepening of Islamic awakening crises will cause serious challenges for USA in the region (Waxman 2011: 71-78).

The revolution in the countries of the region, especially the

evolutions in Egypt, caused some concerns for the Israeli regime resulted in less attention to political and economic issues. The overthrow of Mubarak in Egypt and the hostility of the Egyptian people with Israel are not the issue the USA and Israel can easily pass through. The various Israeli-Egyptian agreements signed disregarding the will of the Egyptian people as well as the dominating and occupying nature of Israel for Palestinian people have caused the coming of the Islamists making a serious fear for Israel from its own future. The happenings in Egypt, the demands of its people to dismiss the Israeli ambassador, cut off gas exports, and abolish state-owned Israel will have a direct impact on Israel's security. The new Egyptian effort to play an independent role as well as the normalization of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas clearly undermines the interests of the USA and Israel. The permission to cross two Islamic Republic ships from the Suez Canal is a clear signal of the immediate proximity of Egypt and Iran, which has become a serious concern for Israel (Byman & Pollack 2011: 246).

### **1-3. Islamic Awakening and Fighting Terrorism**

As mentioned, the fight against terrorism became the hallmark of foreign policy at the beginning of the third millennium and after the events of September 11, 2001. The officials of the USA and its foreign policy team searched for terrorism in the Middle East and, with military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, tried to fight terrorism closely. This major USA interest has been affected by the revolution in the region resulting in some challenges. Although the USA attempts to isolate the Islamist movement from Salafi and

Al-Qaeda's fundamentalism and terrorism, the practical policies of the USA indicate that they see Islamism as a threat to their own interests. The USA believes that the revolutionary currents in the Arab countries and the created instability, along with the currents of the people and the formal groups of other extremist and fundamentalist groups, free their potential and use the space created to achieve their goals. Although the Islamism of the region has no relationship with extremist approaches and even the revolutionaries in countries like Libya have no connection with well-known terrorist movements such as al-Qaeda, there is the possibility of influencing these currents in future governments and among revolutionaries which is a threat to the USA policy of fighting terrorism in the region. A prominent example of this is likely in a country like Yemen. On the other hand, the liberation of the Salafis and the terrorists from the prisons of the revolutionary countries and the creation of new terrorist circles will threaten the USA interests in the region. On the other hand, since in most of these countries there is no stable tradition of democracy, it is possible to dominate extreme currents and their influence in new regimes (Byman 2011: 213-220). Another point to consider is that the USA counter-terrorism policy in the region alone is not operational and that the USA needs a serious ally. The process of regional revolutions has made many of its old and traditional allies change from their popular approaches and reduce their cooperation with the USA which can be a problem for the USA counter-terrorism policy. On the other hand, if the helpless and failed states are faced with revolutionary changes, they are considered as a good factor for the formation and evolutions of terrorism. The existing social and economic conditions in some countries and the existence of weak

states unable to secure and control their territories have created a favorable environment for the growth of terrorist groups. Based on some statistics, such stateless areas can be identified in about fifty countries (Gohari Moghaddam 2011: 188-189).

#### **1-4. Islamic Awakening and Reforms in the Middle East**

As stated, one of the goals of the USA since September 11, 2001 was to prevent the growth of terrorism by adopting a policy of reform in the Middle East and forcing the countries of the region to carry out a specific political, economic and social agenda in order to eradicate the root of terrorism; thus some plans were made by the state of George W. Bush. Despite the serious emphasis of this state on Middle East reform, it had some problems and limitations for the USA foreign policy. For this reason, the problems were not officially prosecuted since 2006 until it was re-raised by the academic and political communities due to the revolutions in the region 2011 (Hassan 2011: 47-49).

With the advent of Obama, he was not eager to advance the Democracy Promotion and Middle East reform agenda. As Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, emphasized the Comprehensive Diplomacy, Development and Defense Plan at the Senate endorsement meeting and did not speak about democracy promotion in the Middle East. In fact, Obama attempted to replace the two pillars of evolutions and dignity with democracy promotion in the Middle East. However, the Arab transformations and revolutions made Arab transformations and revolutions to the reform policy of George W. Bush and inevitably emphasize this issue (Hassan 2011: 50).

The USA has put the return to political, economic and social reform in the Middle East in its agenda. In this regard, the violent adoption of this policy as a result of the collapse of the regional balance of power against the USA is of great significance. This country is on the verge of losing its interests in the region and it is natural to manage the situation to prevent this. However, as George W. Bush did, the reform does not necessarily mean the realization of USA goals. Firstly, the situation of the countries in the region is not the same in terms of the internal and influential conditions of revolutions and developments. In some countries, the states are being abandoned and new structures are under construction (Egypt, Tunisia and Libya), some countries are falling and changing the system (like Bahrain and Yemen), and some conservative countries seem to have put some reforms on the agenda. The effect of the reforms, which are supposed to be performed with the order of USA will certainly be different in these three countries; basically, the question arises whether the USA has the necessary legitimacy to exert pressure for reform in these countries especially the countries undergoing a change of system and revolution or not? Secondly, what will be the effect of possible reforms on the domestic policy of the target countries? Whether this issue contributes to stability in these countries or leads to instability. Indeed, these countries will endure instability in the short term and this could lead to future crises in the USA interests, so that with the threat of vital USA interests, the possibility of the intervention of this country increases in various ways. This issue will not be of interest to Washington due to the adverse economic status and will have negative consequences for this country and its legitimacy and popularity will decrease more (Darwish 2012: 90-95).

### **1-5. Preventing the Formation of a Regional Hegemony Opposed to the West**

The Islamism process in the region and liberation from dependence on the USA caused by the popular revolutions in the region will make the autonomous regional states have more opportunity to realize their interests causing the collapsed USA monopoly in the region and crisis in interests of the country.

### **1-6. Supporting the Regional Partners and Allies**

With the advent of popular government which were not dependent on the West and the USA, the dependency of such popular governments on the USA decreased which resulted in creation of a new regional discipline opposed to the USA in the region. The USA policy in the region was government-oriented not people-centered and the emergence of real popular governments will cause serious problems for the USA.

## **2. American Policy Challenges for Islamic Awakening**

The USA evaluates the evolution of Islamic awakening in form of the following statements:

1. These evolutions were a historical current which occurred during the decolonization after the First World War and the decline and fall of the ottoman empire as well as the evolutions the 1960s and 1970s.
2. No country is safe from these evolutions
3. The roots of these evolutions are considered by the weak governments, the media, tyranny, closed and non-democratic sys-

tems

4. These evolutions are intrinsic and cannot be dictated by any country
5. These evolutions are at new and the Middle East is facing more evolutions.

Based on this assessment, it should be noted that the revolutionary developments in the Middle East have challenged the USA interests in the region. However, the idea that the country is not attempting to regain its former status and provide its own interests is wrong. The USA evolutions followed the evolution management over time, although it was not completely successful. Some American thinkers and strategists consider such evolutions in the Middle East as an opportunity for the country to advance their interests. They believe that the USA has the opportunity to mitigate the dangers of Islamic awakening because in the transition from this stage of experiencing democratic developments, Washington can strive to overlook the inspirational democratic motive of these general protests and keep it as an important value in the minds of people. This group of thinkers believes that the effective way to influence the ideological structure of emerging regimes can be direct diplomacy. Washington's widespread engagement with these regimes can consolidate alliances with them and support the democratic aspirations of these movements (Moore 2012: 12-15).

There are different policies which are carefully considered in how the USA interacts and deals with revolutions. The Obama administration attempted to manage any of the revolutions in a separate way due to facing such evolutions. In fact, this caused some

Obama's policies to be pragmatic about the revolutionary developments in the Middle East. Obama's pragmatism led him to wait for clarification for evolutions, and then act. Some people consider this policy because of Obama's persecution. In other words, the USA policy was remote management and leadership behind the scenes.

In his speech to the United Nations in 2013, Obama admitted that he was shocked by the pace of evolutions that neither the USA nor any other country can dictate certain conditions for regional developments. Estimating such evolutions showed that the actions of this country were passive and reactive. However, this country used various tools for adapting to the new conditions which are examined in the next sections.

Another challenge for the USA in the field of Islamic awakening is the conflict of value-interest in its foreign policy. The USA interests in the revolutionary developments of the region were to preserve the dependent regimes, but the values that Americans always adhere to are in conflict with these interests. The values of democracy promotion and spread of human rights some examples. In other words, the USA policy contains a paradox and a contradiction between maintaining American values and strategic imperatives: American values like democracy, liberalism, and the strategic imperatives of maintaining the USA dictator allies. However, the USA interests are against its nominal values; and that is the controversy that Americans are still engaged in.

On the other hand, the USA was forced to cooperate with non-democratic states in the region to preserve its interests while showing its violent face to their people. This weakened the soft

power of the USA. On the other hand, cooperation with these authoritarian states to suppress terrorism has made the USA refrain from its pressure and insistence on the realization of democracy and reform in the countries of the region. The set of these conditions marked the problems and contradictions of USA policy in the region as a result of revolutionary developments.

### **3. The USA Behavioral Patterns to Islamic Awakening**

In general, four general patterns of Islamic awakening can be identified in the USA behavior.

#### **3-1. Military Intervention**

The USA preferred the NATO coalition military capability against the Libyan evolutions to overthrow Gaddafi's regime and help the revolutionaries. Although the USA faced some problems but could receive the license for intervention in the Security Council with a policy of preventing human tragedy and supporting civilians and could overthrow the Libyan government with the help of NATO allies during several months in order to affect the political future of this country (Hunter 2011).

#### **3-2. Effort for Keeping the Status Quo**

In some cases, the USA attempted to stand against its official declarations along with regional despotic rulers and prevent public revolutions. The obvious example of this issue happened in Bahrain and Jordan. The USA views the common suppression of Bahraini people by the rulers of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia while talking about the right to determine their fate and does not take any

action to the will of people (Diwan 2011).

### **3-3. Managed Power Transmission**

In particular, the USA attempted to manage the situation in Yemen by changing its supporter, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and his successor's deputy in position of president for two years. In fact, this country transmitted the formal power to control the revolution of Yemeni people.

### **3-4. Election Management**

The USA affects the popular election in the countries which could not stand against the popular revolutions in its favor. For example, Egypt's developments, due to their speed and the powerful flow of people came to the point where the USA could not support the ruler of the country. Finally, the Mubarak's government collapsed and endangered the interests of the USA in this country. Nevertheless, the USA attempted to influence the outcome of the revolution in various ways, through its militants and elites. One of the ways in which the United States is acting in this regard is the entry of affiliated individuals and their democratic power. Finally, the USA overthrew the Egyptian rulers with the adoption of a realist policy and support for the military coup to manage Egypt as an influential country in the region. In this regard, the important point is that the USA determined some conditions for the temporary Egyptian rule including the compliance with Camp David Accords the fight against extremism, and the reform of the country.

The USA has implemented different ways to manage the revolutionary conditions. The success or failure of these policies cannot

be definitively determined. However, the vital and most important interests of the USA in the region indicate that this country will do its best to manage the evolutions.

#### **4. The USA Strategies for Islamic Awakening**

The USA has put the following policies in line with the management of the Islamic awakening in the region the following factors, depending on the different conditions, are certainly used in the countries of the region with their own methods and tools:

##### **4-1. Contributing to Internal Reforms**

The USA pushes the governments and elites of the region and its affiliated parties to reform the existing structures. These structures must be reformed in such a way to reduce the possibility of revolution and instability in these countries and control the protests as a temporary medicine.

##### **4-2. Continued Military Presence in the Region and Target Countries**

One of the pretexts of the USA for military action and the presence of its armed forces in the region has been always to support its allies and partners. under the current revolutionary conditions that many USA face the problems, this military presence must continue to be supportive of the USA government's executive policies. On the other hand, the expansion of military cooperation with the countries of the region in this direction is predictable.

### **4-3. Avoiding the Reliance on One Union**

The experience of Islamic awakening taught the Americans this lesson that the reliance on one union could have a devastating effect upon the USA, so that the USA is expanding its bases of influence and not relying on one union.

### **4-4. Promoting a Secular Islamist Model**

The USA knows well that Islam and the Islamic nature of the developments in the region cannot be denied. Hence, it tries to distract the region from these countries and manage their Islamism by providing secular and low-risk Islamic alternatives, such as Turkey's pattern, to the Arab nations of the region.

### **4-5. Proximity to Civil Society and Islamists in the Region**

By understanding the Islamic nature of the changes, the USA is trying to penetrate among the revolutionaries, the Islamists and, and the new elites in these countries to identify them and develop appropriate and alternates depending on the USA for the future government.

### **4-6. Strengthening the Human Rights Discourse**

In the context of its human rights approach, the USA is trying to use this pressure on the new elites in the countries of the region and compel them to respond and to keep pressure on nations and governments in the region.

### **4-7. Advancing the Compromise Process**

The USA considers the issue of the Zionist regime to be one of the

roots of the region's revolutions, so that it will pursue the Palestinian issue with its own approach. The evidence of this is emerging in the region.

## **Conclusion**

The occurrence of popular revolutions in the Middle East has changed the regional order in this global strategic area. The possibility of a civil war, the activation of social, racial, ethnic, and religious gaps has strengthened the separatist movements. On the other hand, strengthening the currents and terrorist groups has added the possibility of extending the crisis to other countries and regions to the region's problems. The emergence of new elites, the strengthening of Islamists in the countries of the region, the confrontation of new revolutionary governments with the old conservative governments, and the growing regional role of independent states in the region, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, all represent the creation of a new regional order that challenges the interests of regional and transnational actors. The USA is no exception to this and the country's interests are widespread threatened. These conditions have led the USA to adopt a set of policies to control and manage the revolutions in the region, in such a way as to force the country to adopt different approaches to these developments. In this regard, some actions have been taken by the USA at a macro level, such as direct military intervention to the apparent changes in the ruling elites. In the long run, the USA is trying to manage the assistance of domestic reforms, the continuation of military presence in the region and target countries, the avoidance of reliance on one union, the promotion of a secular Islamist model, proximity to civil society and Islamists in the region, strengthening human

rights discourse and advancing the compromise process due to the rise of Islamic awakening in the region.

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