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## **THE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF US GEOPOLITICAL POLICIES ON THE DIVERGENCE OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD. CASE STUDY: SOUTHWEST ASIA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Islamic world is one of the most sensitive and strategic regions in the global geopolitical system. The importance of this region is considered in human geography and ethnic-religious conflicts, natural geography, rich energy resources and its communication position. The Islamic world, with its ancient history, has been the cradle of great civilizations and heavenly religions centered on the religion of Islam, so that the religion of Islam has given great importance to this region in terms of geo-culture and civilizational competitions (Shah, Larbi, Batley, 2007). In terms of natural geography, the geographical context of this region is rich in energy resources, and given the importance of energy in the global geopolitical system, the importance of this region and its dependence on mental and objective control of the region for the American superpower is quite clear (Naji, Jawan, 2012).

The geopolitics of the United States of America based on Western liberalism has been objectively and operationally reflected in the region of the Islamic world in general and the region of Southwest Asia in particular. The Islamic world, given its unique role of communication and strategic straits to connect the east and west of the earth, so the control of this region by the US-centered superpowers, the pyramid of power in the geopolitical structure of the world (Hafez, 2000: 15). The United States has always influenced the political, cultural, social, and security phenomena in the region throughout history through interaction and competition with regional actors. The importance of this region with its historical methodology has been such that any power that control this region will take advantage of its natural and human benefits and will be at the top of the power pyramid in the hierarchical structure of power on a global scale.

The importance of this region has created rivalry and conflict between the powers in a two-sided, which can be defined in multilateral and dynamic and blocking manner. In different periods of the global geopolitical system, from the establishment to the periods of geopolitical transition, this region has played a pivotal plan and no power

has been able to maintain its authority and its global power without attention and influence in this region. Despite subjective and objective commonalities, the region has not been able to move towards convergence and cooperation due to geopolitical rivalries influenced by geographical scales at the local, national, regional and global levels, and range of factors from confrontation to cooperation (Tibi, 1998: 2). It has been going on between the actors. Today, regionalism has become a principle in the political-economic world due to its geographical and cultural connections and has affected geopolitical equations. Geographical areas and spaces based on common economic and security needs which are identified by the structures and functions of the region have moved towards convergence and cooperation. This condition leads their region towards sustainable development, security and interaction (Higgott, 2005: 17–39).

The Islamic world, centered on the region of Southwest Asia with a large population and cultural richness, and rich resources have created countless opportunities for convergence in this region, but global geopolitical competition and regional obstacles are the main obstacle in front of its development (Gause, 2016). The regional competitions have created convergence and interaction in post-cold war era. The stability of competitions and interactions has made the crises of this region not easily resolved and has always affected the contradictory and consistent geopolitical discourses of the type and volume of competition and interaction between actors.

However it should be notified that the social, economic and security structures of the center of the Islamic world will change geopolitically. The center of the Islamic world will face scenarios such as the division between Arab and non-Arab Muslims, the expansion of secular states, the spread of ethnicity, the growth of extremism, the development of democracy and Islamism (Zeinolabedin, Jamshidpour, 2020: 267). In the past, the nature of global geopolitical interactions between the United States caused Europe and the United States emerging as dominant players in Middle Eastern regional politics. This claim is based on the extreme geostrategic interests of Europe and the United States (USA) associated with the control of strategic goods such as crude oil and gas, as well as the protection of navigation of freedom. These three variables – oil, gas, and waterways – were the most important components attracting global powers to interact with the Middle East (Simpson, 2017).

Developments in the geopolitical system show that Asia's two rising powers namely China and India are increasingly involved in regional affairs in the Middle East. Both countries are aware of the vital role of the region in future economic growth and development and have included the region in their national strategic plans (Sevilla, 2020: 179). Among them, the most important influential power in this region is the United States, and the geopolitics of the United States has always influenced the convergence and divergence trends in this region. As the geopolitical center of the Islamic world, so-called the Southwest Asia region has always been one of the most intensive region in the world after the First World War. Although there are numerous and varied structural and functional partnerships to create a harmonious regional organization, in the Gulf War era, United States' geopolitical rivalries pushed the region apart, and interactions in this region were unstable for a variety of reasons (Gregory, 2016). The main question of the research is; what are the effects of geopolitical roll of the United States on the divergence of the Islamic world.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**Geopolitics:** The term geopolitics first appeared in 1899 by Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellén in his article on the formation of Sweden's natural borders. Kjellén defines Geopolitics as "the theory that defines the state as a geographic organism, or a phenomenon of a certain breadth." In the early 1970s, geopolitics began to be used, especially in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, to highlight great power rivalries and the regional dimensions associated with them. Henry Kissinger is renowned for restoring geopolitics in US policymaking and academia. The transformation of Nazi Germany into historical memory, Henry Kissinger's widespread use of geopolitics as a scientist and policymaker, and the need to understand geographical factors in international cultural, economic, political and strategic development all contributed to the reappearance of geopolitics in scientific analysis in the 1980s was found. However, there are also different definitions for Geopolitics (Leylanoğlu and Seyedi Asl, 2021: 109). It is also accepted as the specialization of international politics by centers of power and hegemonic governments as geopolitical" (O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 45). Agnew mentions the study of the effects of both human and natural geography on international relations (Agnew, 1998: 15).

British scholar Peter Taylor also considers the study of the geographical distribution of power among the countries of the world, especially the competition between great and pivotal powers in the international system, and defines it as the main geopolitical function (Hafeznia, 2017: 41). Graham Fuller considers geopolitics to be part of an old technique that, in its classical philosophy, emphasizes geography as the determining factor in the behavior of government based on power (Fuller, 1991: 27). The Oxford Encyclopedia provides the following definition: Geopolitics is the study of how policies are affected by geographical factors (Hafeznia, 2017: 3).

The arrangement of the pyramid of power at different geographical levels in the regional and global dimensions determines the geopolitical system. The geopolitical system examines the structure and hierarchy of power geometry based on the geopolitical weight of regions and geographical spaces. The geopolitical system is a combination of the behavior of actors including cooperation and conflict, discourses, ideologies and in general the reading of the political world in mental and objective dimensions. The geopolitical system is dynamic and the hierarchy of power undergoes fundamental changes in different periods of time. For example, the post-World War II geopolitical system was based on the Cold War, in which a hierarchical world based on power was divided into the First World, the Second World, and the Third World.

In the geopolitical system of the Cold War, there were dissimilar interpretations in different political, social and economic dimensions, with the focus on the United States based on liberalism and free economy and the Soviet Union centered on the idea of communism and the socialist economic system (Cohen, 2003). The Cold War era was bipolar, with the poles of world power divided among themselves, as exemplified in the geographical territories of the Iron Curtain and East and West Germany. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the world's leading power, and this American supremacy was realized by the First Persian Gulf War and the discourse of the New World Order. With the complexity of the political world, the process

of globalization, the revolution in information technology, and the change in the nature which shifted to soft power; and also the dynamics of power, new actors have emerged around the world challenging American-centered discourse (Al-Sumait, 2014).

Therefore, the global geopolitical system is in transition today and this power-based system has not yet been formed, which results in wars, tensions and rivalries in the strategic regions of the world. In any geopolitical system at different times, places and geographical areas have strategic value and importance or will lose this value and importance in the state of geopolitical transition. The importance of regions in the geopolitical system is focused on the elements and factors of that region.

**Geopolitical relations:** Geopolitical relations are relations that are formed between political actors based on politics, geography and power (Hafeznia, 2017: 362). Geography provides bedrock for the formation of the political will of relations, and power with relying on the geopolitical weight of political actors which determines the main role in the manner and type of geopolitical relations. Geopolitical relations based on the level of power form a spectrum of interaction, domination, influence and competition. The interactive relationship is centered on the relative equality of power levels, and in this type of relationship, the actors have a respectful attitude towards each other and act cautiously even in case of conflicting interests with each other.

The domination is based on the inequality of power between two political actors and is a vertical and one-way relationship of pressure and political will. Influence reflects domination and is the result of power inequality. This type of soft power relationship is invisibly applied to geographical spaces with focus on socio-cultural discourses. The competitive relationship is based on the relative equality of the national power of states, and actors compete with each other on the basis of conflicting interests. Competition can be applied in various fields, including geo-economic, geo-strategic and geo-cultural dimensions, and political actors under this condition with a variety of conventional and unconventional methods compete with each other and form their own relationships.

**Geo-economics:** Geo-economics is the study of the political and spatial in aspects of economics, geography and politics. Geo-economics is a branch of geopolitics that examines politics, resources, and economics together. In 1990, Edward Luttwak introduced the geo-economic model with a broad concept of international relations and other political science related to international analysis. He saw the nineties as a decade in which economic components replaced military and geostrategic goals (Luttwak, 1990). In this regard, some thinkers have interpreted the emergence of a geo-economic approach in competition with the great powers as an economic war.

The leaders of the Western powers believe that with the dynamics of geo-economic, the center of economic power will be protected and also the economic structure of the world will be regulated. The geo-economic approach is quite evident in the trade policy of countries, and it is an attempt to attract markets and gain economic power in the regions. The geo-economic approach is made up of a combination of the three factors of geography, power, and economics, and examines the relationships of these three and their interaction in order to gain the power of the actors.

It is believed that the 21st century world power is an economic power that can keep its economy dynamic through its geo-economic approach, but at the same time

the dynamism of the economy undeniably needs energy, so it is a superior power over resources. Perhaps this is why Southwest Asia has always had a significant influence on the foreign policy of the great powers. Thus, geo-economics is an approach to the analysis of international issues, especially the competition of governments in sensitive regions of the world; in which geography, power and economy interact with each other (Hafeznia, 2017: 73). For this reason, geo-economics should be considered in conjunction of the geopolitical discussions. Also, it is argued that “Economics is a motivation for power struggles, and where geopolitics determines economic conditions, it takes on a geo-economic aspect” (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 118).

**Geo-culture:** The scientific term geo-culture consists of the two words geo which came and mixed with cultural elements. According to the traditional view, geo-culture refers to the unified, integrated nature of the planet Earth. Therefore, the analysis of geo-culture requires having a global attitude to cultural-discourse processes (Heidari, 2008: 149). It means nations always have a special place. However, gradually, many countries paid attention to cultural relations with foreign countries, and in the field of their foreign policy, a section called foreign cultural policy emerged (Mohammadi, 1998: 89).

The introduction of “geo-culture” is the result of the rise of Samuel Huntington’s ideas (1970s) about the clash of civilizations in the United States. It is the beginning of the period of influence of civilizational-cultural differences on the political formations of the world in new power struggles (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 57). Nowadays culture plays a role in various forms of national politics and international politics. Hence, the theories of “clash of civilizations” or “dialogue of civilizations” itself reflect the role of culture in human relations and the creation of patterns of war and enmity, or peace and friendship between them (Hafeznia, 2017: 177). Today, the rationale of culture and cultural influence has become one of the tools to weaken and strengthen the power of countries, and the role of ethnic-religious groups in this dimension of politics to weaken the rival in the competition between powers is very prominent.

**Geo-strategy:** Geo-strategy examines the relationships between strategy and geographical elements. Fixed geopolitical elements (elements of natural geography) form the geostrategic foundation and it has a profound effect on the use of tools and facilities. Tools and facilities are selected and used according to the geographical conditions. Therefore, the relationship between position, territorial size, and national power are defined by geo-strategic studies. “The geostrategic scholars evaluate the value and credibility of space from an economic, political and military point of view and make recommendations on the performance of international relations in relation to the observance of security and national interests” (Ibid.: 232).

There is no doubt that geo-strategy studies is the study of the effect of strategic factors of geographical, regional and global environment on the political decisions of governments and the mutual influence of countries in the regional and global dimensions, and power policies. Ezatullah Ezzati defines geo-strategy as the science of discovering the relationships that exist between a strategy and the geographical environment (Ezzati, 2000: 8). Moreover, Geo-strategy is considered as the science of geopolitical relations with strategy, and it puts emphasis on the design of military and effective participation in war, or even to properly understand military strategy and

tactics. According to this approach, the combination of geography, global issues and strategic factors form special geographical areas from which it can be interpreted as a geostrategic area (Grygiel, 2006).

### **SHIITE GEO-CULTURE**

From a geographical point of view, Shiite territories can be divided into the four sections, which include Shiites of Iran, Shiites around Iran, Shiites of other Asian countries and Shiite groups in other parts of the world. Shiites are scattered in about 10 to 12 percent of the world's Muslim population in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Yemen, Lebanon, and Bahrain, depending on their language, race, culture, and method.

In the meantime, Iran, in addition to other advantages and capabilities such as having an exceptional geographical location and communication in the Persian Gulf region and a unique position in energy geopolitics, has an important focus on the Shiite world. Therefore, the biggest concern of Middle Eastern governments, especially the Persian Gulf countries, is the expansion of Shiite influence in the region after the fall of Saddam and the spread of Shiite movements (Amiri, Fllah Nejad, 2018: 85).

The Shiites have now been able to seize political leadership in Iraq, achieve political victories in Lebanon, and work hard to gain power in Bahrain. In these three countries, Shiites make up the majority of the population, and the Shiite religion is a common factor in their unity. The Congressional Research Service reports that you have identified three major security threats since the fall of Saddam Hussein: The expansion of Iran's influence in the post-Saddam era; the rise of Shiite demands in the GCC countries under the influence of the situation in Iraq and the fear of an overflow of the conflict from Iraq to the whole region. The realities of the Shiite world in the Middle East and their rise to power in the current regional system have provoked mixed reactions from the major powers and some Sunni religious countries in the region. In fact it is one of the most important religions that opposes the discourse on American geopolitics is the Shiite religion, and Shiism, with its cohesive leadership, has been able to manage and lead the withdrawal discourse of American forces in Southwest Asia (Hazbun, 2011).

### **SUNNI GEO-CULTURE**

Sunni-populated areas centered on the Persian Gulf countries have a fragmented atmosphere and its political geography and national borders have been affected by the geopolitical rivalries of the superpowers and their interventions over the past few centuries (Stein, 2006). Looking at the political structure of these countries, it can be seen that the dominance of Western countries, especially the United States, in building the political and security power of these countries is one of the common points between them. The West Asian region is made up of Muslims with a high majority, which are divided into two main groups, Shiites and Sunnis. The roots of religious conflicts be-

tween Muslim countries date back to the early days of Islam, which has been the root of many differences (Helfont, 2009). The ideological conflicts between the Muslim countries of West Asia generally stem from the anthropological, political, cultural, and various social realities and their leadership, which has led to the divergence of these countries. One of the most important consequences of this issue is the incitement by foreign powers to abuse the governments of the region, for example, the involvement of foreign powers in the formation of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, ISIS in Syria and Iraq caused heavy losses (Stein, 2006). Shiite-Sunni discourses are one of the key flaws to US geopolitics. Al-Qaeda continued to be a pretext for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the establishment of several Western bases in the West Asian region. Sunni governments, meanwhile, are more in line with US geopolitics in the region, and their security depends on US-centric Western powers.

### **AMERICAN GEOPOLITICS VERSUS THE ISLAMIC WORLD**

With the defeat of fascism and communism, the liberal democratic system saw itself as unrivaled, but in the Islamic world, Islamic fundamentalism shook the liberal democratic system. The Islamic Revolution of Iran has always stated its opposition to the new structure of the United States and the creation of a unipolar system in post-cold war era (Yazdani, Hussain, 2006: 275). The study of the Islamic Awakening in the Islamic world also showed that one of the goals of most popular uprisings in Islamic countries is to fight the new world order proposed by the United States. Given the perspective of the Muslim community, it is noteworthy that the Iranian discourse does not make a fundamental difference between Shiite and Sunni sects in Islam. Thus, the discourse of the Islamic Awakening is Iran's strategic vision for communicating with the Islamic world in order to move it beyond Western models of governance and to re-emphasize the ideas of Islamization in the public sphere. It emphasizes Muslims should theorize their theories and experiences according to the pure Islamic politics within their native discourse. In fact, Islamic fundamentalists believe that Islamic social movements are influenced by factors such as leadership, depth of awakening, political and social conditions, and support the changes at the social level and go beyond this level by establishing institutions. In their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a good example to show the stages of awakening which become a social movement and followed by becoming an institution and Islamic government (Alviri, 2005: 223). In *Theory of the Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington predicts religious tensions and sees political Islam as the main enemy of Western culture and discourse, and believes that Confucian countries will unite with Islamic countries and challenge Western culture (Huntington, 1993). September 11, 2001 is considered as a turning point in US policy, and this event has been the background for the discussion between religion and the geopolitical factor in modern times. What 9/11 brings is the fact that the geopolitics of religion has never been vanished, neither in 1648, nor in 1776, nor in 1789, nor at any time to this day.

Hence, religion as a phenomenon is not separated from other social and cultural phenomena; can be studied analytically apart from politics. In fact, religion is closely

linked to political, sociological, and economic systems and domains. In his article *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington argued that “significant conflicts will arise in the future along the lines of cultural divisions that separate civilizations” (Macala, 2017). Hence, the West, with such geopolitical discourses, invaded and created territories in different geographical regions of the world with the focus on the Persian Gulf region. The West has used the factor of language and ethnicity to weaken various countries in the Persian Gulf region. In fact, the West, by launching a religious game and sectarian war, seeks to discredit the religion of Islam.

Given the recent developments in the region, such as the Arab Spring in 2011 and the formation of the ISIS terrorist group in 2014, it is possible to guess to what direction the developments are aimed at. The trend and perspective of developments is moving in the direction of long-term goals of the Western discourse of Balkanization in the Persian Gulf region. The Balkanization, which leads to the creation of the small number of countries in the region, also improves the control of Western discourse over the region, as well as providing a necessary and sufficient excuse for the West to intervene in regional affairs.

Shireen Hunter and Graham Fuller are among the researchers who believe that the issue of political Islam comes up with the priority and superiority of security, political and economic interests. In their view, Islam is seen as militant to the extent that it threatens the political interests of the West (Nazari, 2008: 329). In fact, this approach, unlike the previous approach, does not consider Islamism to be purely religion in nature, but has a political nature that tries to eliminate the political, economic and cultural domination of the West. Fuller also believes that what frightens the West most, is the geographical and geopolitical location of Islamic countries covered with abundant natural resources (Hunter, 2001: 36). It can be inferred that religious discourse is a tool for reviving and repelling Western hegemony, and it must be eradicated as it seeks to undermine Western legitimacy. In general, what the West, centered on the United States of America in the Persian Gulf region and the Islamic world is the political organization of the region based on their own goals and strategies. Today, new actors have emerged who have seriously challenged Western policies and strategies and slowed down the implementation of the Greater Middle East Plan (Feltman et al., 2019).

**Military Rivalries:** In anarchic conditions, the ultimate goal is security and survival. If survival is guaranteed, governments can achieve other goals such as prosperity, development, power, and so on. Therefore, the primary and fundamental concern of governments is to maintain their survival in the international system. The dilemma of security and survival is a condition in which governments do not have confidence in each other’s goals. This approach introduces the security of units in the form of acquiring and upgrading military and weapons capabilities. In fact, developing weapons and equipping the units with weapons and military equipment are considered as the main solution (Ghasemi, 2005: 50). In this situation, feeling less secure is tantamount to buying more weapons. Thus, the process of competitive armament indicates the emergence of an arms race (Sadeghi, Ghasemi, Pourjam, 2015: 121).

The region of West Asia (Middle East) has faced the issue of security from the very beginning due to its special and unique features. On the other hand, the history of



the Middle East region has included the most enduring and acute centers of conflict, namely the conflicts between the Arabs and the Zionist regime, and conflicts such as the first and second wars in the Persian Gulf. Hence, many countries in the region, by emphasizing the urgent need for security try to increase their power, influence and their military capability to achieve advanced equipment. Thus, they are caught in the inevitable cycle of an arms race (Ghasemi, Pourjam, 2015: 81).

The arms race is a direct result of hegemony in the region. The United States has paved the way for an arms race by pursuing a strategy of balancing forces in the region and preventing the emergence of superior power in the region. Because of the instability within the region, the Americans claim that the main problem in the Middle East is not the lack of democracy, but the influence of some regional actors. Therefore, by changing its security strategy in the region, it has increased the sale of more weapons and arm dealing (Colby, Mitchell, 2019).

The arms race between the countries of the Persian Gulf region is not a race for prestige and a special position among other countries in the region, but is a result of a cycle of security threats due to mistrust that underlies some rivalries (Soubrier, 2020: 3). In the meantime, the arms race in the Southwest Asian region has provided the greatest facilitation for the operation of US geopolitics, and in this way, the United States has been able to prevent convergence and interaction between members by creating a gap between regional actors. So the competition of superpowers and world powers in the region is about arms sales.

Given its strategic importance and huge profits, arms sales now occupy a large part of the global economy, so the great powers of Russia, China and the European Union are in close competition with the United States as the world's superpower in selling military weapons to Iran and Turkey through political relations. However the volume of US arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iraq and Kuwait indicates the greater ability of this superpower to sell military weapons (Clayton, 2017).

From the past to the present, the United States has taken many steps to influence in various parts of the world, including the strategic region of West Asia and the Persian Gulf. In this direction, the United States seeks to help the survival of these governments by strengthening the rentier regimes and monarchies of the Persian Gulf countries through the sale of repressive weapons, various military trainings, and the expansion of relations with these countries. In fact, the same US policy of "divide and rule" continues today in West Asia, from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Yemen to Lebanon and occupied Palestine (Soubrier, 2020: 4).

As the West Asian regional order is transitioning to a new order, one of the most important consequences of the new US West Asian policy will be to create more barriers to building local security in the region. US West Asian policy is leading to increase regional alignment, intensify arms rivalries and a continue security dilemma among the Gulf States. The existence of a security conundrum in the region has not only been an important factor in the process of increasing bilateral defense pacts in West Asia, but also it is a serious threat to the convergence of the Islamic world (Colby, Mitchell, 2019).

Indeed, imported security in the form of bringing a supra-regional power into regional competition in recent decades has not led to the desired security. This is because

the intervention of supra-regional powers is in the direction of achieving their interests, and it has considered the internal dynamics of regional security as an obstacle to achieving these interests and has sabotaged the path to its realization. Thus, the US presence in the West Asian region, while keeping the threat potentials active, prevents the formation of regional order and stability and the cooperation of countries in the region to shape the processes that facilitate cooperation. The complexity of the security dilemma in the region leads to the greater thirst of the rulers of the Arab countries in the region for the purchase of weapons and increasing militarization of the region.

**Proxy wars:** Proxy wars, usually in line with the goals of rival powers avoids direct and face-to-face war that can cause heavy material and spiritual damage in the new era (Ghanbari Jahromi, 2021: 9). Washington and Moscow by using their capabilities to coordinate the actions of governments prevent direct confrontation. This is happening in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, Libya and many other countries, and this has become a decisive trend in a new phase of global competition. After World War II and the acquisition of several leading nuclear weapons powers, the most powerful countries in the world began to prevent direct conflict.

It does not mean that the rivalry between them has stopped in the form of armed conflict. On the contrary, the whole of the second half of the twentieth century is marked by the numerous wars that the West and the socialist bloc waged against each other in the territory of the Third World. So, both the United States and the Soviet Union, although avoiding direct conflict, sent troops into countries where they had an interest (Michnik, 2020: 23). The US military was fighting in Indochina, and Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and military trainers and specialists from both major powers, were present in the army and guerrilla movements and almost everywhere there was war – in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and the Middle East.

Both the US military and the Soviet Union were killed in distant lands while fighting for their country's geopolitical interests. In the contemporary world, the situation has changed. The enormous damage suffered by the United States during the Vietnam War forced the US leadership to gradually abandon large-scale hostilities in other parts of the world.

As for China, it is already a Maoist insurgent group to consolidate its interests in neighboring countries of South and Southeast Asia, primarily in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and in turn also in the Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia. Thailand, Indonesia and Bangladesh have been benefited (Cabestan, 2020). In Syria, the United States counted on extremist-religious groups that were the main force of the anti-Assad resistance in the early stages of the war. Pentagon officials hoped that radical groups could overthrow Bashar al-Assad with the support of a significant portion of Syria's Arab and Sunni population (Ghiasvandi, Torkashvand, 2018: 188). Partly because Russia came to the aid of Damascus by sending air forces, military police and special forces to Syria.

With Russia's involvement in the Syrian war, many Kurds were sympathized by European community and then the Americans quickly "changed direction" and began supporting the Kurdish resistance, which was fighting against the government forces of Bashar al-Assad and against Islamic radicals. In fact, it was with the direct help of the United States, the Kurdish People's Defense Forces in Rojava province were re-

equipped and modernized. For Washington, the Syrian game was even more important than maintaining relations with Turkey, so US officials continue to provide military assistance to the Kurdish resistance (Aziz, 2020).

In Yemen, we see a new way, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates act instead of the United States and Iran instead of Russia. Tehran has special interests in Yemen that are related to supporting the Houthis, who have a religious affinity with Iranian Shiites. But in the first place, the Iranian leadership is interested in weakening the positions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the Middle East, and Yemen is one of the countries where Iran can easily rely on local Shiites who have a negative attitude towards Riyadh (Tabatabai, Clarke, 2019). In addition, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are actively benefiting in Yemen from the military assistance of less prosperous Arab countries such as Sudan, which is sending troops to fight the Houthis.

This is not surprising that Sudan has a relatively large army that Khartoum will use to benefit Saudi Arabia, while in turn receiving guarantees of support for the military regime from Riyadh. Neither the United States nor Russia wants to get involved in the conflict in Yemen, but they are defending their interests. In Libya, we are witnessing a confrontation between the main Libyan tribes, which are also supported by the Western countries, Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. But in the Libyan war, unlike in the Syrian conflict, the major powers still prefer not to intervene directly, even though American and European troops are still on Libyan land (Laub, 2016).

**Market Competition:** The United States and other Western powers have sought to dominate the economic life of the Islamic World with a focus on Southwest Asia. Despite fluctuating political and security relations with the countries of the region, the United States is trying to maintain bilateral economic ties with the countries of the Persian Gulf region in a calm and continuous movement in order to have more maneuvering power to compete with rivals and great powers (OPEC Share of World Crude Oil Reserves). On energy and the importance of energy, the common interests of the great powers and superpowers have led to interaction and cooperation to use this energy and secure their interests. The main competition of these powers is in the field of energy security, so that the United States claims to supply energy in the Persian Gulf region, and thus has more maneuverability in competition with competitors (Morrissey, 2008). In the face of US maneuvering power over energy security, the great powers of Japan, China, Russia, etc., are interacting more with each other to neutralize US hegemonic stability in the region.

Another economic importance of the Persian Gulf region is the market for the sale of military weapons, given that there are ideological contradictions in this region, so the competition of superpowers and world powers in the Persian Gulf region is about arms sales. Given its importance and huge profits, arms sales now occupy a large part of the world economy, so the great powers of Russia, China and the European Union are in close competition with the United States as the world's superpower. Therefore, the great powers have not been able to compete with the United States, and only Russia has been able to compete with the United States in selling military weapons to Iran through political relations with Iran (Toghyani, Arabahmadi, 2020: 187). But the volume of US arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait indicates the superpower's greater ability to sell military weapons.

**Energy resources:** West Asia provides access to the Indian Ocean for countries in the region, which has led to the dominance of the strategic straits of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb, Bosphorus and Dardanelles, as well as the Suez Canal, which can be strategic in global developments. In the heart of the world (Heartland), the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, which separates Saudi Arabia and Iran, is strategically important as a huge gateway to the world's oil reserves.

West Asia, and especially the Persian Gulf, contains two-thirds of the world's oil reserves and one-third of the world's gas resources. West Asian countries, especially in the Persian Gulf, have about two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves and one-third of the world's natural gas, accounting for 70 percent for oil and 40 percent for gas, by taking into account the resources of the Caspian Sea. Therefore, with these interpretations, it can be concluded that the energy reserves of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea are important and geostrategic facts for West Asian countries.

It can be said that the strategic areas and resources in the West Asian region show the very important position of this region in the world. This region has the largest energy reserves in the world. The known oil reserves of the Persian Gulf countries are 360 billion barrels, which means that 64% of the world's oil reserves belong to the seven countries of the Persian Gulf. The most important and largest oil reserves in Saudi Arabia are 163.2 billion barrels, Kuwait 65.4, Iraq 59, Iran 56, UAE 7.5, Qatar 3.7 and Bahrain 2.4. Among these, the five main oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia-Kuwait-UAE-Iraq-Iran) with about 81% of OPEC reserves are the most important producers and exporters of crude oil (Karbasi, Chamani, Olumi Baigi, 2015: 547).

The impact of oil on nation-building in this region can be examined in different ways; the existence of huge oil reserves in the Persian Gulf region, especially in the field of political economy, caused the dominant power in the region, namely Britain, to prevent the unification of the Arab lands and to entice and provoke the ruling families in today's countries (Abolhassan Shirazi, Akhundi Mehrizi, 2007: 198). What is important for the geopolitics of the United States today is to master the control of energy-rich resources, as well as the access of this global superpower to strategic places and areas of energy transfer. If the United States cooperates and converges in the Islamic world, it will not be able to easily meet its energy needs and control energy flow. Therefore, the policy of the United States of America in the region can be interpreted in terms of mental disintegration between regional actors.

## CONCLUSION

The Islamic world, with its focus on the region of Southwest Asia, is one of the critical and strategic regions in the geopolitical system at the spherical level. Huge reserves of energy, seas and communication routes, as well as its vastness and large population, have made this region a focal point in political and geopolitical equations. There are various opportunities in the Islamic world region, so that convergence in this region has the potential to fundamentally change the structure of world power. Despite the vast human and natural capacities of geopolitics, crises and inconsistent rivalries between the great powers and superpowers has had devastating effects on sustainable

development and sustainable security in the region. So that geopolitical crises are the main obstacle to convergence. These crises and rivalries have prevented the economic capacities of the countries in the region from flourishing, especially the countries that are engaged in security and marginal issues, political conflicts and incompatible rivalries. Due to the geopolitical importance of this region, the role of superpowers and great powers in the geopolitical crises of the region and the intensification of rivalries are inevitable.

The results show that the economic wheel of the US-centered superpowers is spinning with hydrocarbon energy sources, and these powers are in increasing need of the Persian Gulf energy resources to meet their needs. Most of the world's energy resources are in the Persian Gulf region. Therefore, US geopolitics is present and influential in the Persian Gulf region for easy access to energy resources.

In the geo-economic dimension, due to the importance of energy resources and the global economy's need for energy, the United States tries to access energy resources in this region so that cooperates with other interventionist powers. Another competitive layer of the great powers and superpowers in the Persian Gulf region is in the field of military arms sales and its huge profits, and given the US hegemonic power and military presence in the region. Consequently the only major power competing with the United States is Russia in the Persian Gulf region which is resulted in the United States and Russia competition for arms sales centered on Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the field of Geo-culture and Islamic fundamentalism, all supra-regional powers interact with each other for the sake of common economic interests, such as in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, with fear of Islamic civilization to undermine Western liberalism. In terms of Geo-strategy and access to critical locations such as the Strait of Hormuz and US military bases, it calls for the region's undisputed military power to maneuver through energy security to compete with major powers especially US aggression. In this way, they reduce the capacity of the United States. Therefore, any cooperation and interaction between the countries of the Islamic world is in conflict with the geopolitical interests of the United States, and this world power has always tried to create tension in the Islamic world in order to meet its geopolitical interests in economic, cultural and military dimensions.

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### ABSTRACT

The Islamic world is one of the most important regions in the world in terms of geopolitical competition, focusing on the region of Southwest Asia in terms of geo-economic, geo-strategic and geo-culture. Despite the widespread commonalities in the political geography of the Islamic world in structural and functional terms, the interdependence of the region has not been able to move towards convergence, cooperation and interaction. One of the influential variables in the political trends of this region has been the geopolitical policies of the United States of America. The United States has always influenced the political trends of this strategic region based on its goals and interests. The result of researches show that the United States has a significant impact on divergence of Islamic world in terms of geo-culture in promoting the discourse of liberalism, geo-strategy on arms sales and stabilization of military rivalries between world powers, and geo-economics in free market competition and cheap energy resources. The convergence of Islamic world has been against the geopolitical interests of the United States of America.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, United States, Divergence, the Islamic World, Southwest Asia

### BADANIE WPLYWU PARADYGMATU GEOPOLITYCZNEGO W POLITYCE ZAGRANICZNEJ USA NA DYWERGNCJE W OBREBIE ŚWIATA ISLAMU. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU AZJI POŁUDNIOWO-ZACHODNIEJ

### STRESZCZENIE

Obszarem zainteresowania autora stał się region Azji Południowo-Zachodniej. Został on poddany analizie ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem czynników geoeconomicznych, geostrategicznych oraz geokulturowych. Pomimo szeroko rozpowszechnionych podobieństw w geografii politycznej świata islamu pod względem strukturalnym i funkcjonalnym, czynniki te okazały się niewystarczające aby wspomniany obszar zmierzał w kierunku konwergencji, współpracy i interakcji. Jedną z istotnych zmiennych mających ogromny wpływ na region była polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. USA współkształtując trendy polityczne tego strategicznego regionu kierowały się swoimi celami strategicznymi oraz interesami. Zdaniem autorów Stany



Zjednoczone mają znaczący wpływ na dywergencję świata islamu w zakresie geokultury – poprzez promowanie dyskursu liberalnego, geostrategii – poprzez sprzedaż broni i utrzymywanie rywalizacji militarnej między światowymi mocarstwami oraz geoekonomii – poprzez utrzymywanie wolnorynkowej konkurencji i niskich cen surowców energetycznych. Autorzy podkreślają, iż ich zdaniem konwergencja świata islamu była sprzeczna z geopolitycznymi interesami Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** geopolityka, Stany Zjednoczone, dywergencja, świat islamski, Azja Południowo-Zachodnia

