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(ISIL/IS) as a Systemic Threat on the
Mediterranean Basin in the New World
Perception**

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Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/IS) as a Systemic Threat on the Mediterranean Basin in the New World Perception

Huseyin Surucu

Abstract

Seen as the biggest imperial power in today's modern world and to the extent as the Modern Rome Empire by some politicians' and academics' assessments, the USA had decided to shift the strategic pivot towards Asia before Hillary Clinton's article published in *Foreign Policy* in 2011. This decision was made during the Bush era and one of its first practices was the Greater Middle East Initiative. The purpose of the USA was reorganization of the complicated area in order to turn onto Asia. That is, the USA wanted to render sustainable the process of existing system without the USA itself for a while, since it has been in axis shift. Thereby, some effects have been taken place in this region since 2010. As a result of this project, all countries (except for Tunisia) which were exposed to this project have broken politics. In other words, some governments were changed, collapsed or have been obliged to protect its own legitimacy by means of Arab Spring such as Syria. But this doesn't mean that Arab Spring is a production of this project; it is a by-product. In other words, it triggered a social explosion and it diffused with knock-on effect throughout all geography. This project caused all events that people have experienced until now, ensured support because of their forms of government and, in the beginning, these events were perceived positively. However, both the USA's wrong choices in practice and misreading of regional states on existing system in the area have led to emergence of new security problems. One of these new security problems is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/IS) which is an appearance of a new and differently structured terrorist organization. This organization was built for constructing new order in Muslim World. Unfortunately, it was founded a new life space in Iraq and Syria, because of misapplications of the project and this terrorist organization is different in terms of its structure and its targets we have ever known. Consequently, it is anomaly and the world should come to grips with this threat. This problem can be solved in two ways. One way is to eliminate the ISIL/IS, and the other way is to transform it. These choices depend on costs which they may bring out.

Whichever way will be chosen, the ISIL/IS's earnings caused contingencies of being an example for other terrorist organizations which nurture from vacuums in Africa. Especially, unless the European Union (EU) produces new techniques to cope with these newly structured terrorist organizations, these will be very complicated danger for Mediterranean Basin.

Key words: Islamic State of Iraq and The Levant, Pivot to Asia, newly structured terrorist organizations, Mediterranean Basin.

Introduction

New competitive focus that was determined by American foreign policy is Asia-Pacific Axis. It was declared by the article written by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in *Foreign Policy* in November 2011¹. After this declaration, all global and regional powers for new competitive focus should concentrate on Asia-Pacific Region in order to keep and sustain their ongoing powers. Thus, Asia-Pacific perspective, which is the new world perception, has been taken to forefront instead of Europe-Atlantic perspective which is the old world perception.

Despite the fact that new competitive focus was determined as Asia-Pacific Region spatially, nor can the range of the focus be limited spatially because of input effects of technology for today. Politicians have capitalized on this situation in order to imply for real interests. Considering Hillary Clinton's article all in all, although she made a mention of withdrawal of the USA troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, the reality may have been different. The article shouldn't be perceived of divergence from the Middle East. That is, because it includes more implicit meanings. But it is certain that the axis shift will cause some changes on international system. These changes are in three ways: These are systems change, systemic change and interaction change. Systems change is a change in the natural of actors that constitute international system. Systemic change is a change in order or governance of an international system. Interaction change is a change in the process or relationship among elements of international system². At first look, even if the declaration of axis shift may be perceived as an interaction change, this shift will be likely to be beyond in respect to its results. Because international system must be assessed with behavior, process, structures, and actions of its constituent sub-systems and environmental factor limiting the operation of the system³.

That's why, this paper assumes that the USA have predisposed to axis shift and focuses on systemic effects of the USA's axis shift politics' negative outputs on Mediterranean Basin. In other words, this paper will concentrate on what it means in terms of the system ideally rather than its terrorist identity. In this concept, first section is about relationship between the Pivot to Asia-Pacific and the Middle East -the Northern Africa Regions. Second section focuses on the effect of systemic change of Great Middle East Initiative (GMEI) -which is starting point of wrong politics on the Middle East-, and Arab Spring and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/IS) -which are the by-products of GMEI against international system-. The last part is conclusion section and it points out the negative effects of new threat on Mediterranean Basin and the European Union (EU) briefly.

¹Hillary Clinton, "American's Pacific Century", *The Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> (Date of Access: 06.12.2014)

²Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 39-40.

³James N. Rosenau, *International Politics and Foreign Policy, A Reader in Research and Theory*, 1969, New York: The Free Press, p. 77

The Effect of the Asia-Pacific Axis Shift

According to “American’s Pacific Century” article by written former Secretary of State of the USA Hillary Clinton, it was declared that Iraq and Afghanistan missions would be finished and the USA’s resources and time would be spent on Asia-Pacific Region in forthcoming period. So, the USA has faced to old neighborhood. The USA is both a Pacific country¹ and certainly a naval power²; so this turn is supposed to be normal. Also, the USA is liken to the Modern Rome Empire by most academicians and politicians, since it has unique location on world because of existing geographical characteristic of the country. The USA has bordered with two oceans and distance of important conflicts areas. It takes some advantages. Not only has the USA accessed to vital commercial roads directly³, but also it has restrained infiltration of some continental problems⁴. Meanwhile, the country takes new opportunities to shape its future politics freely because of ongoing location. In addition to its location, conjuncture has supported it. Because the USA have led the international system that was constituted in 1648 in Westphalia, and the United Nations (UN) has been the home for now. But the USA wanted to redefine international system because of its power maximization in new world order that was formed in wake of the Cold War⁵. Because the USA has perceived “the unipolar moment⁶” as “a hyper power⁷” that will continue in new world. That’s why, firstly, the USA may pursue goal to re-designate the South Area of Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East before axis shift. That is because that area is an important place, in terms of not only hydrocarbon sources, but also commercial roads to Asia-Pacific. On 17 August 2001, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Defense Paul Wolfowitz emphasized that US troops must have been everywhere, all around the world. Especially, in distant anti-access or area-denial environments [as] ranking high on the list of priorities⁸. Thus, he he intended not to be effective more than itself in that geography (the Middle East and its immediate environment)⁹. That is because possible power vacuum has been likely to be dangerous for both American interest and the reality of

¹Mackinder, H. J., “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *The Geographical Journal*, 1904, Vol. 23, No. 4, p. 436

²Nicholas J. Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy, II”, *The American Political Science Review*, 1938b, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 222

³Nicholas J. Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy, I”, *The American Political Science Review*, 1938a, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 43

⁴Nicholas J. Spykman, 1938b, *ibid*, p. 214

⁵Tim Dunne, “Society and Hierarchy in International Relations”, *International Relations*, 2003, pp. 308-310

⁶Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, 1990, p. 27

⁷Eliot A. Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2004, pp. 62-63

⁸Sheila Carapico&Chris Toensing, *The Strategic Logic of the Iraq Blunder*, Middle East Research and Information Project, 2006, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer239/strategic-logic-iraq-blunder> (Date of Access: 27.01.2015).

⁹Aylin Güney&Fulya Gökcan, *The “Greater Middle East” as a “Modern” Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy*, *Geopolitics*, 2010, 15:1, p. 25.

the end of the world's scenarios¹. So, some projects or plans like GMEI have been inevitable in order to ensure sustainability of those areas. It has proved that Brzezinski established relationship between Asia-Pacific and the Middle East in terms of the USA's role in his book "*Choice*" published in 2004 and he kept his idea in "*Strategic Vision*" published 2012. Also, re-design of those areas was brought into forefront by Rand Reports that written by Graham Fuller in 1991 and Cheryl Benard in 2003. But, because of point view of neo-realists, the USA neglected "dynamic element"² of the international system. Because the USA is the leader of the international system after the Cold War and it behaves as a king of the stability of traditional international system relying on its dominate power. Meanwhile, American society set about overbalancing traditional social order by means of globalization³. Although the the dominant effects of the USA have been taken some advantages, its negative perception and breaking social order caused reaction towards the USA, due to reaction of globalization and so, the USA's position was broken by means of technology which is the balancer of social weakness. That is because to neutralize effects of geographical differences is one of the features of technology⁴. In other words, American society have transformed into a more intolerance society, because of accusations and hubris syndrome. This situation triggered to power maximization. By doing so, it increased power difference among other countries. And that difference was broken in 9/11. After 9/11, the USA professed "With Us or Against Us" towards all countries in the UN. By doing so, the USA had pretended to behave as a hyper-power and it had still kept same idea (intention of change of world order). As a result of that posture, both Iraq War in 2003 and GMEI was not supported by great powers. But unsupported insistence of the USA triggered a new type of threat. Needless to say that, threat is about systemic change. That may cause breaking of Westphalian States System.

Shortly, the USA neglected relationship between agent-structure of international system.

The Systemic Effect of the Great Middle East Initiative (GMEI):

As mentioned above, 9/11 legitimized GMEI which was devised intellectually in advance in order to re-designate the Northern Africa and the Middle East⁵. Initially, that project was advised in a constricted way in 2004 G-

¹Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Tercih: Küresel Hakimiyet mi Küresel Liderli mi?*, İnkılap Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2005, p. 24

²Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change*, 1994, Princeton University Press, Princeton and New Jersey, p. 12.

³Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2005, *ibid.*, pp. 24-27

⁴Robert Kaplan, "Vast Continent, Small World", *Global Affairs with Robert Kaplan*, 2014a <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/vast-continent-small-world> (Date of Access: 03.12.2014)

⁵Strategic Comments, "The Greater Middle East Initiative", *Strategic Comments*, 2004, 10:2, p. 1

G-8 Summit; then it transformed into a comprehensive project, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Northern Africa¹ and MENA (*Middle East and Northern Africa*) term was appeared in the literature of international affairs. According to this plan, Middle East, Gulf, and Northern Africa include similar security problem because this area and its imminent environment² are:

- the arena of dangerous state-sponsored religious war;
- the place that fanatic regimes try to obtain mass destruction weapons;
- the source of militant movements that have more obscure rules;
- the place has more than half world population and 75% of the world's poor population, and
- the place of population explosion and the main source of ongoing immigration pressure that has still increased gradually in international arena.

Although, the purpose of that project is to render sustainable human rights and to establish democratic regimes, with regard to the continuity of American State Policy, it may make an impression of policy towards pivot to Asia-Pacific. That is because these areas are important for all states in terms of energy sources and energy roads. Also, this geography is vital for the USA's allies and, especially, Eastern and Far Eastern too, but not specifically crucial to the USA itself³. That's why, unsupportive Iraq War and GMEI were perceived differently and its legitimacy suffered from erosion, even within its allies⁴. Although the Project lost your initial effect on these areas, because of the government change in the USA, some effects took place in this geography and these effects was erupted as an "Arab Spring" and diffused all MENA. But this doesn't mean that Arab Spring is a production of this Project, it is a by-product. In other words, it triggered a social explosion and this diffused with knock-on effect throughout all geography. This Project caused all events that people have experienced until recently, ensured support because of their forms of government and, in the beginning, these events were perceived positively. In other words, GMEI focused on ideas like groundless democracy and freedom instead of shortcomings of public administration and institutional structures.

¹Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers, "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start", 2004, Carnegie Endowment, s.1-2; Strategic Comments, p. 1-2

²Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 61

³Robert Kaplan, "The End of the Middle East", *Global Affairs with Robert D. Kaplan*, 2014b, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/end-middle-east>, (Date of Access: 15.12.2014); Ahmet Kasım Han, "Turkey's Energy Strategy and the Middle East: Between a Rock and a Hard Place", *Turkish Studies*, 2011,12:4, pp. 610-611.; Alexander Neill, "China and the Middle East", *Adelphi Series*, 2014, 54:447-448, pp. 206-207.

⁴Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Stratejik Vizyon: Amerika ve Küresel Güç Buhranı*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul, 2012, p. 59.

Once this was ally with social movements¹, Arab Spring appeared. So, stabilization by means of Arab Spring is a dream. Because all countries (*except for Tunisia*) which were exposed to this project have broken politics -and have still generated security problems for both immediate and distant environment-. These areas have still worked as a problem machine and have caused some fluctuations because of changing environmental factors' processing, developing of different power centers and domestic factors². Needless to say, most countries in these areas have state-to-nation imbalances. This picture leads to production of revisionist policies if the country is coherent. Otherwise, states generate secessionists and differently motivated terrorist organizations and Arab Spring paved the way for two options. Moreover, Arab Spring is due to state-to-nation imbalance facilitated emergence of illegitimate states, pan-national unifiers, irredentists, failed states and illegitimate nations³. It means that similar problems will be likely to appear in other states, if they have state-to-nation imbalance. That is because expansion starts at line of least resistance and occurs in waves⁴. New and differently structures (*like ISIL/IS*) -which act as a state but completely a state and not recognize another rule of law (*like NATO, UN, refusing international system*) except for itself in existing place- are appeared expansion of that risk because of nation-to-state imbalances of in MENA countries⁵. Although, the USA is ability to be successful in terrain as a military power, it has been unable to be unsuccessful in national/state building operations for last ten years in some Muslim countries with complex structures that have nation-to-state imbalances⁶. So, MENA's fragility level has increased increased gradually. In this kind of projects, states should take consideration all elements. Otherwise, there is inevitable emergence of undesirable/uncontrollable consequences.

That is, both the USA's wrong choices in practice and misreading of regional states on existing system in that area has led to emergence of new security problems. For today, the name of this new security problem is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (the ISIL/IS). Needless to say, ISIL/IS is a bloody terrorist organization. This organization is more different other similar terrorist organizations in terms of systemic. Because this organization have seized some areas in both Syria and Iraq, assumed social and economic of a state and seen as the caliphated, unlike other terrorist organizations. The root of this idea is based on the letter between Ayman El-Zawahiri (one of the core

¹NCAFP, "The Greater Middle East: The New Political Landscape", American Foreign Policy Interests: The Journal of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, 2012, 34:1, p. 47.

²Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations*, London&New York, Verso, 2003, p. 17.

³Benjamin Miller, "Balance of Power or the State-to Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War-Propensity", *Security Studies*, 2006, p. 665-669.

⁴Nicholas J. Spykman ve Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy I", *The American Political Science Review*, 1939, p. 392

⁵Scott Stewart, *Jihadism in 2014: Defining the Movement*, 25 December 2014, Stratfor, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/jihadism-2014-defining-movement>, (Date of Access: 09.01.2015).

⁶Robert Kaplan, 2014b.

leaders of Al-Qaeda) and Abu Musab al Zarqawi (one of the founding leaders of ISIL/IS). It was about importance of Iraq in battle and the attributed importance to caliphate¹. On June 29, 2014, the ISIL/IS declared establishment of a caliphate and demanded that all Muslims pay homage². This action is a direct threat against international system. In other words, the ISIL/IS is to pursue an aim at non-territorial structure. Not only does not it accept another power in seized area, but also it threatens international system built in 1648 by means of its non-territorial structure. But this concept is unacceptable for system, because it based on internal hierarchy and external autonomy³. So, its attitude is a challenge. All the countries should resist this threat and co-operate. Detente between the USA and Iran because of this threat is an example⁴. That's why this problem can be solved in two ways. One of them is to eliminate the ISIL/IS⁵, and the other one is to transform it. Those choices depend on costs which they may bring out.

Conclusions

Westphalian System is based on internal hierarchy and external autonomy. Structures like ISIL/IS capitalize on the gap between the anarchy of international system and state's choice and pursue a goal at finding position in international system and the ISIL/IS is one of them. The ISIL/IS has evolved ideally and has learnt from Al Qaeda and other religion motivated terrorist organizations' mistakes. Also, it has still nurtured from unsolved problems (*Nation-to-state imbalances of MENA, social problems and violation of UN's verdicts*). That is, the ISIL/IS is a result of the natural selection's past problems. This terrorist organization is different in terms of its structure, we have ever known. These types of organizations are flexible and cope with variable problems by changing of their center of gravity. Shortly, both the Arab Spring and the ISIL/IS are anomalies and by-products of the USA's wrong choices in practice and misreading of regional states on existing system in that region. Needless to say, Northern Africa has similar problems like the Middle East and this situation paves the way for emergence of these types of organizations. Whichever way will be chosen in order to cope with the ISIL/IS, these organizations have upgraded in terms of their targets. It has a dream of non-territorial state. This dream is certainly threat against the system. This can be impossible in long-term. But it is certain that it will be power vacuum in

¹David Kilcullen, "Counter-Insurgency Redux", *Survival*, Winter 2006-07, 48:4, p. 114.

²Scott Stewart, "Jihadism in 2014: Assessing the Islamic State", 08 January 2015, Stratfor, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/jihadism-2014-assessing-islamic-state>, (Date of Access: 09.01.2015).

³Hendrik Spruyt p. 191

⁴George Friedman, "The Islamic State Reshapes the Middle East", 25 November 2014, Stratfor, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/islamic-state-reshapes-middle-east>, (Date of Access: 09.01.2015)

⁵Scott Stewart, "Jihadism.."

region after each try and in result of these tries, amorphous structures are likely to exist for a moment. Whichever way will be chosen, system is to have erosion and it affects Europe (*both narrow and broad terms*) negatively. Attacks by adherents to the ISIL/IS in France and drowning refugees in Mediterranean Sea are premise of not only examples but also systemic/system change. Moreover, reactions to these threats are to create new security problems. That's why the Europe is unable to cope with these threats lonely. The member states of the EU should act together against these threats as cooperating with other regional states. Within this scope, the EU should:

- organize variable activities in MENA in order to complete shortcomings of public administration and institutional,
- intend to focus on periphery of centre, instead of only center. So, legitimacy of projects by carried out can be ensured,
- impede overreactions to threats within the Europe in order not to erode European's values and norms,
- look at holistically and make one or more states a partner in its projects, and
- give weight to education of democracy in order to adopt democracy mindset.

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