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A CRITICAL APPROACH ON INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COALITIONS: THE CASE OF ISRAEL'S INCLUSION TO CENTCOM

ABSTRACT

This paper develops a critical approach on the relative significance of regionalism as an explanatory framework and examines what kind of developments have occurred harming this relative significance. For this purpose, it closely looks at the relationship between international military coalitions and their regional partners. The main argument of this paper is this relationship will harm the regional alliances, and indirectly the regional peace stability. Even though the international military coalitions say their main goal is to make the peaceful environment stabilized, this paper suggests that the actual result may be an increase in the lack of confidence between regional countries. This lack of confidence will also harm the regional peace stability in reverse to the aim of international military coalitions. This result can be called the crowding-out effect of non-regional coalitions.

Keywords: International Military Coalitions, Regional Relations, CENTCOM, Middle East, Israel

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of regionalism has been increased so much to understand the international system and its ongoing. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, developing powers have been interested in developing their ties with their neighbors. Besides the several motivational resources of this preference of states, it has also changed the perspectives to understand the international political order. Before these crises in 1991 and 2001, hegemonic competition and bipolar world order theories could give many incisive insights to evaluate the circumstances in world politics. However, after these crises, the theories have lost their efficiency and alternative explanations have taken momentum. Hurrell (1995), Kelly (2007), Katzenstein (2005), Buzan (2010), Mearsheimer (2010), Dieter (2009), Mittelman and Falk (2000), Thompson (1973) are academicians to study explanatory frameworks and regionalism is one of the most preferred ones. The almost a quarter-century after the Soviet collapse in 1991 and the US political crises in 2001 has many experiences that can change this evaluation from hegemonic stability to regionalism.

This paper develops a critical approach on the relative significance of regionalism as an explanatory framework and examines what kind of developments have occurred harming this relative significance. For this purpose, it closely looks at the relationship between international military coalitions and their regional partners. The main argument of this paper is this relationship will harm the regional alliances, and indirectly the regional peace stability. Even though the international military coalitions say their main goal is to make the peaceful environment stabilized, this paper suggests that the actual result may be an increase in the lack of confidence between regional countries. This lack of confidence will also harm the regional peace stability in reverse to the aim of international military coalitions. This result can be called the crowding-out effect of non-regional coalitions.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section reveals the historical background of regionalism in international relations. It focuses on the period especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and after the 9/11 crisis of the United States although regionalism has sounded before. The second section summarizes the mutual interaction between international military coalitions and regional political movements. Indeed, this paper essentially takes regionalism as the dependent variable in this relationship. However, it is also aware of the counter-effects of a dependent variable on the interdependent variable in any formula. Therefore, to crosscheck the main argument about the harmful



effect of international coalitions, this paper examines the effect of regionalism on international coalitions. The third section seeks to the insights from the decision of the US CENTCOM to include Israel. The interpretation of the possible scenarios is on the core of this section for the peace stability or peace possibility in the Middle East long-lasting sought. The last section concludes the paper.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF REGIONALISM IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The international political order has experienced very fundamental changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 9/11 crisis of the United States. Even though it seems like that the former has raised the positive expectations for human freedom and that the latter has threatened world security, both have increased the anxieties about how the future of the world would shape. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the integration of the Russian Federation without any aggression was the main agenda of the western powers. On the other hand, the political and economic sustainability of the newly interdependent countries were also very important to keep the international political arena away from any aggression. As hegemonic stability theory suggested, the international political order could realize this purpose only under a security umbrella of a hegemon that was also away from any aggression. On the other hand, after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, the idea of a 'security umbrella' has completely collapsed because the US became an 'assailable' country. This assailability has made the US a more aggressive country and obliged to follow harder security policies all over the world. This essential change in the US security policy has transformed the story in world politics. This transformation can be interpreted under two important phases: the security phase after 2001 and the economic phase after 2008.

I. THE SECURITY PHASE AFTER 2001

Besides the collapse in the minds about the idea of a 'security umbrella', the aggressive security policy of the US all over the world has made its interlocutor countries more anxious about their sovereignty and security. Additionally, the statement of incumbent President George Walker Bush which enforced world states to be with the US or to be against the US caused these countries to search for alternative models to keep safe their sovereignty and security. Because of the impossibility of isolation in the international political structure under the pressure of American aggression, many countries have sought to improve their relations with other countries than the US. The most probable countries to establish an alliance were of course the neighboring countries. In



this sense, many regional powers tried to improve their relations with neighbors and also to decrease the problems with them. Russian Medvedev Doctrine, Turkish policy called Zero Problems with Neighbors, the acceleration of the EU Enlargement process, Chinese membership to the World Trade Organization, the establishment of new international initiatives like the Alliance of Civilizations under the United Nations can be good exemplifications for the trials of new alternatives against US aggression. By improving ties with the closest territories, the related states tried to establish a safe area out of their borders to keep away any militaristic threat to their territories. In addition, they believed that a good neighborhood could increase the capability to isolate the United States in any case of a rise in tensions.

The increase in the neighborhood and the trial to decrease problems with any country makes regionalism a more popular theoretical framework to understand world politics after 9/11. Although the security concerns may be the main motivation for states to follow this policy, it cannot be said as the sole explanation tool of regionalism. Additionally to the security concern, the trading state concept was also a trending concept in international relations to make sense of the increase in the compassion of the states. To take stronger steps to be a wealthier state, any states need to increase its trade with other countries in favor of its current account balance. For them, this 'international compassion' could increase the opportunities to have a bigger trade volume. For instance, the protocols between Turkey and Armenia in 2009 proposing the establishment and development of diplomatic ties between two states have been explained under the motivation of Turkey to increase its trade (İşeri & Çelik, 2015). The Russian interest in the ex-Soviet states became more sensible with the argument that Russia sought control of natural gas resources in Central Asia [citation]. China sought to maintain and to make sustain its incredible growth rates since 1980s. Therefore, the concept of trading state handled as a very significant term to explain the change in states policies, and also in world politics during the first decade of the millenium. However, the US economic crisis in 2007 leaded the story begun in 2001 to shift from the security anxieties to economic concerns all over the world.

II. ECONOMIC DIMENSION

In 2007, the mortgage sector of the US has lived a deep crisis and the banks in the US that were too big to fail were on the verge of bankruptcy. In those days, many economists had started to talk about the re-birth of Keynesian economic models to save the world economy from a whole collapse. The US Government might apply Neo-Keynesian economic policies to the US Economy by buying



the debts of the banks to the stakeholders in the mortgage crisis; however, this type of policy was only towards the domestic labor and real market of the US. In addition to these Neo-Keynesian policies in good and services markets within the US, the Federal Reserve (FED) has also implied very big quantitative easing economic pockets to finance the US budget. On the other hand, because the US dollar is accepted as the reserve currency in world trade, this quantitative easing for the US domestic markets has some results for the markets outside the US. This result was very simple: The export of the US debt crisis to the international economic system. Although this export was the natural result due to the almost-fully-integrated-money system in the world, it also has some other results in the perspectives of states on the world economic system and their possible responses to it.

Briefly, world states have preferred to respond to the security crisis in 2001 by improving their ties with their neighbors. On the other hand, they were obliged to take precautions against any possible economic problems coming from any countries in the world including their neighbors. As a result, while world states had a positive face in international politics after 2001, they must shift from this positivity to skeptical neutrality after 2007. While improving ties have sounded like the most efficient tool for a secure environment from US aggressive security policy, neo-conservative economic policies have allowed securing their existing wealth in international politics. This hard shift from security positivity to economic skepticism has some important results for the increasing trend of regionalism. Whereas this paper examines these results in the next section, it can be noted that the security concerns all around the world, necessary or unnecessary, have increased and also still is increasing the need for non-regional military coalitions as an alternative defense mechanism against regional threats. Even though establishing or joining any regional and non-regional coalitions sounds very normal to keep states' security sustainable, this paper suggests the necessity of asking for the results of these coalitions on regionalism. To do this, the next section will interpret the mutual interaction between international military coalitions and regionalism.

THE MUTUAL INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COALITIONS AND REGIONALISM

Wolford suggested that international military coalitions can produce political results 'from successful coercion to the outbreak of war to wide-ranging confrontations that draw neighbors and distant powers alike into counter-coalitions' (Wolford, 2015, p. 3). And he suggested that these political outcomes



raise two important questions. The first one is what the impact of military coalitions is on the probability of war and peace. The second one is on the probability of provocation of coalitions to counter-coalitions and the expansion of conflicts.

These two questions also reflect the dilemma for regional countries about their security. While states aim to deter the security threats by joining the international military coalitions from their regions too, this participation also encourages the sustainability of those threats. The serve of international military coalitions as a safe area for its members attracts more states to participate in international military coalitions. The Commands of US Army all over the world are the most famous example for these international military coalitions beyond the institutional military unions like NATO. Even though they also started as a regional military alliance, they become inter-continental military alliances.

Theoretically, the transition from regional to inter-continental characteristics causes perception to occur such as regional alliances without international references are less preferable for states to keep their security sustainable. The deterrence capability of big international military alliances like NATO usually makes states in and out of their regions more responsive to the possible supports of international coalitions. On the other hand, any conflict of interests with any regional state pushes a state to get closing the international coalitions. The rapprochement between a regional state and an international military coalition generates the counter-rapprochement between the conflicted regional state and another international military coalition.

In the case of the absence of an alternative international military coalition, the conflicted regional state can make itself isolated from regional alliances as well as international cooperation in further problems. The magnitude of the institutional and military infrastructure, the diplomatic ties, and opportunities from the participation to an international military coalition are the determinants of the domination of the international coalition over regional alliances. Therefore, in consequence, international military coalitions have usually a destroyer effect on regional relationships.

As international military coalitions have various impacts on regionalism, regionalism is reversely also impactful on the shaping of international military coalitions. Regional alliances generate important political and economic benefits for states. For instance, the ASEAN members have agreed on the demilitarization of almost 100 km area from borders. This agreement has created



a safe zone for neighboring countries without any intervention of an international military coalition. This safe area means the end of possible threats from neighboring states and non-state actors, the possibility of the launch of economic zones between each other. Such kinds of benefits become indispensable for states within the process, and these existing benefits from regional ties are a limitation for shaping the areas of influence of international military coalitions.

The interaction between the international military coalitions and regionalism consists of substitutive relations rather than complementary relations. Indeed, both have some security and economic benefits for states; however, they cannot be in compatible relations with each other. Because this paper examines Israel's case to be included in CENTCOM from the perspective of the domination of CENTCOM over regional peace stability, the limitations of regional relations to CENTCOM's domination over the Middle East are left to further researches.

The series of economic crises after 2007 in the US has generated a very sufficient ground for a destroyer effect on improving regional relations. As addressed, many European, Asian, Latin American and Middle East states have deeply experienced the impacts of the economic crisis in the US and many of them started to imply more conservative economic policies and trade tariffs to secure their assets from possible international crises in future. Because of the inseparable relation between economics and politics, conservativeness in economics brought skepticism in foreign relations. Therefore, the positive discourses like soft power, mutuality, common future, etc. have experienced a hard decrease in their significance in foreign policies of states that followed a more softening profile in international politics after 2001. In skeptical psychology, skeptics seek for trustable partners. The more crisis is bigger, the more the partner must be bigger to be trustworthy. Therefore, neo-conservatism after 2007 pushed the states bigger economic alliances that could also serve as a security alliances. The states without such an alliance become alone and vulnerable in the international politics.

Because international military alliances give the perception of the necessary and sufficient ground for economic stability and solid security, many states preferred to seek for international military alliances rather than regional positive relations. For instance, Turkey sought for the support of Russia to eliminate the terrorist organizations like PYD in Syria rather than remedying relations with and compromising Syrian government. Egypt has sought for international military cooperation to gain the control of Sinai Peninsula from



terrorist organizations rather than compromising Saudi government, for example. Ukraine, Georgia have always waited an international alliance against Russian aggression against their territorial sovereignty rather than improving relations with Russia. Poland and Germany didn't try to have good relations rather than seeking for international support to each other. South China Sea states like China, Vietnam, and Cambodia have never sought for resolutions of property problems in South China Sea, but they tried to find an international partner to protect their rights on South China Sea.

The examples on the substitutive relation between international alliances and regionalism can be increased. However, the point is to see the capability of international alliances to dominate regional partnerships. In all examples, there was a starting point for becoming away from regional alliances and for seeking international partners. In the next section, this paper discusses possible scenarios of the Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM on the regional relations despite the Abraham Accords which sounds like an improving the regionalism in the Middle East. In other words, the dynamics of Wolford's argument on the counter-coalition effect of international military coalitions will be applied to the Middle East after the CENTCOM decision on Israel.

THE CASE ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL'S INCLUSION TO CENTCOM

Israel's inclusion in a non-regional military coalition is not new for the Middle East, indeed. Before the decision of CENTCOM to include it, Israel has been also a member of EUCOM. Because of the fundamental problems with Muslim Arab states, Israel has had continuously security problems since its establishment. Although Israel wasn't an object of serious attacks that could challenge its existence since the Six-Day War except for Hamas and Hezbollah, the possibility of an existential challenge has been always at the core of Israel's foreign policy agenda. In addition to Israel's attitude that its arm has the power to struggle with its all enemies [citation], it didn't ignore being in international military alliances like EUCOM. These international military alliances have allowed Israel to deter these continuous regional threats from Hamas and Iran, as far as possible. In cases of unavoidable wars with Hamas and Iran leded Hezbollah, Israel has fought them to show its military power and to test its new military equipment like Iron Dome, unmanned air vehicles, etc.

On the other hand, Israel has also tried to legitimize its Israel's Settlement Policies by stating itself victimized. Because of the alliance with Israel un-



der international military coalitions like NATO and EUCOM, the international community is contented with just blaming Israel due to its illegitimate settlement policies, especially around al-Quds. However, due to the support of international military coalitions, the inefficiency of the international mechanisms that can enforce Israel to apply the decisions of International Courts has made non-regional alliances more effective and desirable for Israel since its establishment announcement.

The inclusion in CENTCOM has been the last incident that increased the international support behind Israel. To look at the reflections of the inclusion decision, the Pentagon announcement must be evaluated, firstly. On Friday, January 15th, 2021, the Pentagon issued an important announcement regarding Israel's inclusion in the CENTCOM. The Inclusion Statement stated about the change in Israel's position. "The United States today made a change to the United Command Plan. The 2020 Joint Command Plan removed Israel from the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility and placed it in the responsibility of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)". It means the change of Israel's position in the international security alliances. In addition, the Pentagon expressed in the announcement that "The reduction of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors after the Abraham Accord provides a strategic opportunity for the United States to bring together key partners against common threats in the Middle East. Israel is one of the leading strategic partners of the United States."

In addition to this statement from the US, Israel has also addressed the positive side of this inclusion to the normalization process through Abraham Accord by referring to the same enemy with the Gulf States in the region. Moshe Patel, head of the Missile Defense Organization of the Israeli Defense Ministry, said that Israel could also hold joint exercises with new allies in the Gulf. He stated that "from an engineering perspective, of course, there are many advantages. Since we have the same enemy, both sides can share information, for example, sensors can be deployed in Gulf countries." Patel made these assessments after the military exercise with the participation of officials from the US Missile Defense Agency to test Israel's David's Sling and Iron Dome air defense systems.

Concerning the impact of this decision on regional relations, the announcement stated that this step emerged as strengthening support of the Normalization Agreements. The Abraham Accord, signed in September 2020, is considered a turning point that initiates normalization between Gulf states such as the UAE and Bahrain, and Israel. Additionally, as a result of these normalization



agreements, the Gulf States, firstly, recognized Israel as a state in contrast to the historical non-recognition policy and began to cooperate with Israel in the fields of economic, political, and security. Within the scope of Normalization Agreements, Israel signed some cooperation protocols with the UAE, especially in the field of defense industry and security. On the other hand, Normalization Agreements offer new routes for flight paths. Moreover, the new routes also contain non-participant countries. For instance, Saudi Arabia also opened its flight areas to Israel like other countries although it is not part of the Normalization agreements.

Following the Abraham Accords and the Protocols, the Qatar crisis in 2017 was also resolved in the latest period of Trump's government while regional tensions have increased. Immediately after this resolution, the US recognized the UAE and Bahrain as the Main Security partners, as they grant them special status in military and security matters. Kuwait was then made the main Non-NATO ally. This definition means that Countries that are given the right to cooperate with NATO countries militarily, participate in joint military exercises and be privileged in arms purchases.

CENTCOM decision is a step to realize the Normalization Agreements in practice although a top-down normalization occurs in the Agreements, a step is needed to make this kind of rapprochement permanent since officials and employees working in institutions can work together smoothly. In other sense, interoperability and maturation of interagency coordination can be achieved through ongoing interaction in practice. However, those steps taken after the normalization agreements can be considered as the process of building the Middle East security architecture. Although the architecture of this alliance against Iran theoretically begins with the normalization agreements, strengthening and the maturation of this alliance requires institutionalization as the second step. This step can also be considered as an indication with the long-lasting projections. Some allegations like Arab NATO raised the question whether Arab countries would succeed in formation such an alliance. In this context, the CENTCOM decision can give a good answer to this question. While independent Arabs can pose a threat to Israel, an institutionalized security architecture can really be considered as a well-designed response that meets existing needs and addresses security vulnerabilities.

While looking at the collaborative promises of Normalization Agreements and the inclusion of Israel's in CENTCOM, the anxiety about the possible counter-coalitions can sound as improper. Because the comprehensive statements by the generals of CENTCOM and Israel, the interlocutor Arab states can be-



lieve in the probable gains from the Israel's inclusion to CENTCOM through Abraham Accords. On the other hand, the existing critical issues like al-Quds, the settlement policy of Israel, the expansionary ideological background of Zionist movement that have dreams for the lands of Arab states have the potential to harm the circumstances of Abraham Accords. Additionally, the fault lines within the Israeli politics has risen within the process and this situation may have the potential to return Israel from some of its promises to the Arab states in Abraham Accords. Reversely, because of these fault lines, Arab states can return from the Abraham Accords due to their possible threat perceptions.

The developments after the attacks of the Israeli Army to al-Aqsa in April 2021 have shown the possible results of the fault lines and possible counter-coalitions in the Middle East despite the Abraham Accords. After the attacks of radical Zionists to the al-Aqsa Mosque and the intervention by the Israeli police to Palestinian protesters have resulted in never-seen-before incidents. The Israeli citizens in Lud called 1948 Arabs who have never clashed with Israel started to uprising against the Israeli government. Additionally, a mass of people come to the Israeli border from Jordan and Lebanon to support the Palestinian protesters for Al-Aqsa. This kind of counter-movements of civil society within Israel and from other countries has some kind of pressures on their states to take a position against Israel's settlement policy and al-Aqsa aggression.

Beyond the pressures of civil society, the acceleration of diplomatic connection between Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon is the sign of the counter-coalition against Israel and the other signatories on Abraham Accords within the Middle East. The most serious counter-fact against Israel can be thought of as this rapprochement between Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Also, 'Kuwait has individually condemns the Israeli settlement policy and the Palestinians evictions from al-Quds' (Chalhoub, 2021). The reactions of 'Kuwaiti, Moroccan, and Pakistani parliamentary members to Israeli Knesset Members from the Zionist Union in the Inter-Parliament Union assembly in Saint Petersburg in 2017' have also shown the sensitivity of some regional and non-regional countries to the Palestinian and al-Aqsa (Winer & Ahren, 2017). Although these reactions have never noteworthy responses from Israel since its establishment, they have some limitations in the Middle East and have resulted in the stability of regional peace.

The negative anxieties from Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM are not only because of the existing imbalances within the Middle East but also because of the possible effects on Transatlantic relations. This inclusion may refer the change in the US strategic mind not only for the Middle East but also for Eu-



rope. In other words, the removal of Israel from the EUCOM responsibility area means that the US doesn't want the improvement of the relations between European countries and Israel, anymore. While thinking of the normalized relations between Israel and some Arabian Gulf countries, any improvement between European countries and Israel may have negative reflections in the US strategic mind like losing its areas of influence in Europe as well as in the Middle East. Therefore, in the US strategic mind, there is a substitutive and competitive relation between the US and European countries for military presence in the Middle East. On the other hand, the announcement referred to the meaninglessness of understanding the change in the position of Israel as a product of the competition between Europe and the US. Reversely, the rejection of Arab states to recognize Israel was the main cause for Israel's presence in the European Commands Area of Responsibility.

This recognition and the following normalization process between some Arab states and Israel ends up the necessity for Israel's presence in European Commands Area. Therefore, the removal of Israel and the inclusion of the CENTCOM is not a sign of the competition between Europe and the US, but it will only bring opportunities for cooperation with partners in the US central force region. Despite any reactions from the European Union since then, this change may result in the occurrence of another fault line between Europe and the US. Even though this removal from EUCOM won't have any result in the US-Europe relations, it leads to a division between European states.

As seen in Figure 1, Europe as the continent is separated into two parts as countries only recognizing Israel and countries recognizing both Palestine and Israel. Additionally, a large survey conducted by ComRes for CNN in 2018 asked more than 7,000 Europeans in seven countries about their view on Israel shows an important sign for the future. According to the results, 'while 57 percent of respondents aged 65 years or older have a positive image of Israel, only 32 percent of people younger than 35 say they do' (Hirsch & Coi, 2021). This differentiation within the European society by generation may be the sign of a negative ongoing situation for Israel in Europe. If this separation within the European society doesn't have any result for the Israel-Palestinian issue or the regionalism movements in the Middle East, it will have most probably on the situation of regionalism in Europe. Furthermore, as Israel increases its aggressive policies on Palestine and al-Aqsa, the negative ongoing in Europe will accelerate in the same level.



CONCLUSION

The security crisis after 2001 and the economic crisis after 2007 have definitely opposite effects on the effectiveness of regionalism in the international political structure. The former has accelerated the positive reactions of neighbors to each other whereas the latter caused them to keep in skepticism in neighboring relations. Of course, as Buzan, Baldwin, Mearsheimer and other academics argued, regionalism become a level of analysis in international relations and a sub-system with its separative characteristics from international political system. On the other hand, the last decade of the world history has moved to a completely opposite directions because of the two important crisis of the US in 2001 and 2007.



Figure 1. Europe Map of recognition Israel and Palestine

The relative significance of regionalism that Buzan et al. suggested have also affected by this side slip in international politics. This paper argues that Israel's inclusion to CENTCOM will be the next example of the crisis of regionalism. While Abraham Accords seems like an improvement in regional ties, the inevitable occurrence of the counter-coalition like between Turkey, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, and Lebanon against Israel's policies shows the reality on the aftermath of regionalism. The international support especially in the fault lines like al-Aqsa has only acceleration of the bad destiny of regionalism. To resolve this crowding-out effect of internationalism on regionalism, theoretical understanding of international coalitions must be more deeply studied in further researches.



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