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Dependency Theory on Examining the Relationship between the United States and the Middle East: In the Case of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey

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***Abstract*—**Dependency theory was developed since 1950s, with economic concerns. It divided the world into two parts, the states of the peripheral (third world countries) and the states of the core (the developed capitalist countries). Another perspective developed to the theory with the implementation of the idea of semi-peripheral states in the new world order. With these divisions (core, peripheral, semi-peripheral) this study aims to develop a concept from the perspective of dependency theory, to understand the nature of the relationship of the U.S. with the Middle East Regions through its relation with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The tested countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey) are seeking a foothold and influential role in the region. The paper argued that the U.S. directs its policies toward the region, in the way to guarantee no country of the region will be in semi-peripheral level (that could create competitions or danger on the U.S. interest). Therefore, U.S. policies in the region have varied from declaring war to diplomatic channels and sometimes ignoring. The paper is based on the dependency theory, and other international relations theories used to study the Middle East in the international context.

***Keywords*—**Dependency, hegemony, imperialism, Middle East.

I. Introduction

ANALYZING the relationship between the United States (U.S.) and the Middle East takes us directly to the dependency theory framework, explaining this relationship. We will analyze the two dimensions: power and economic. Realist scholars focus on the concept of power, while liberal theorists focus on the concept of economics. However, neither of these two approaches investigates semi-peripheral states (presented by the dependency theory in its states' divisions).

Raul Prebisch, the director of the United Nations economic commission for Latin America, proposed the dependence theory in the late 1950s. Prebisch and his colleagues were puzzled by the fact that economic prosperity in advanced countries does not lead to growth in the poorer countries. Indeed, their research has shown that economic growth in wealthy countries has always contributed to severe economic problems in developing countries [1]. There are other sources for this dilemma. For instance, Baran claims that the tendency of developing countries to specialize in the production of one type of export has led these products to be controlled by the local elites and the global economy [2].

One of the pioneers of the dependence theory, Dos Santos, divided the world into two parts, the states of the peripheral (third world countries) and the Core countries (the developed capitalist countries) [3].

Wallerstein (1975) was the first to implement the concept of semi-peripheral states in the new world order. He believed that these countries play an independent role in the global and capitalist economies. The semi-peripheral countries take the role of the core towards the peripheral states, and the peripheral states take the role of the core [4]. He adds that if core countries weaken or fall, this will benefit the semi-peripheral countries, but a small number of semi-peripheral countries can do so, to be core, unless they change in their economic situation. The semi-peripheral can also rise when the power of other semi-peripheral countries ends. The semi-peripheral includes economically stable countries and countries with political backgrounds such as Brazil, Mexico, Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran, Turkey, Canada, and Indonesia [4].

According to the dependency theory's main principles, the relationship between the U.S. and the Middle Eastern Countries is a strategic one, especially with its relation with the oil-exporting countries. The U.S. formulates its policy in order to control the oil sources in the region.

In terms of the external influences, dependency can characterize the economic, political and cultural development policies. The term dependence refers here to an essential dimension of the 'Third World Countries' political culture. In these counties, both the economy and politics are deeply influenced by their reliance on rich Western countries [5]. The concept of dependency focuses on the unequal relationships and links between states, small groups and social classes within the third world and the relationship between the third world and those in the western world [5]. Clearly, the dependency theory focuses on the relationship that arises between capitalist countries and third world countries. The capitalist countries depend on establishing relationships with elites and influential groups in those countries to ensure their control over those countries. The concept of dependency focuses on control to a great extent. This is reflected in the nature of the relations between the countries. In this paper, U.S. policies towards Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey will be analyzed to achieve the dependency theory.

II. The Middle East and Dependency theory

The dependency theory may fit into a comparative study if we use the distinctive notions and roles that define the school

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of dependency. The Arab world's development studies have been dominated by the viewpoint of modernization, which is a Western self-serving commodity [5].

The way the Middle East countries rely on the community of advanced Western countries could be noted in many areas. Their intertwined history of domination and repression is centuries-long, beginning with Napoleon Egypt conquest in 1798 and continuing to the new capitalist world today. Aspects of reliance can be found in various fields, such as the export of petrochemicals, food imports, and household necessities [5].

If we consider the paradigm of dependence as a close relation to the theory of imperialism and economic imperialism, which is still the main feature of imperialism, we can see that the Western power control of Arabic culture, communication and education is almost infinite [5].

The concept of imposing cultural hegemony through ideology distinguishes colonialism from imperialism. Imperialism is driven by ideology, while colonial powers used full technology of knowledge as one of the essential methods of exercising their power to subjugate the region for which the imperial project was intended [6].

Historically, U.S. hegemony in the Middle East and North Africa has been expressed by its ability to turn or generate major geopolitical crises, shape regional states' actions, and reconfigure the domestic balance of power between local governments communities when required [7].

The countries of the Middle East are linked to the Western world with a colonial history. Most of the countries in this region arose as a result of treaties between western countries during the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Some of these countries belonged to Great Britain, and other countries belonged to the French Republic. They were divided into provisions and mandates. The situation remained unchanged until the end of WWII in 1945 when the role of these forces declined, and the United States emerged as a dominant and controlling power in the region.

Reference [8] argues that the European position of supremacy over the region and its people contributed further to the unequal relationship with Europe, which he called "Orientalism".

The Middle East was a British-French cultural project until the end of World War II, and the rise of the United States' role in controlling the region is not different from Western civilization tries to expand since ancient times [8].

Edward Said viewed Orientalism as an authoritative use of knowledge of the East, to domesticate it in preparation for colonization and control of it [8].

What we see today of modern nation-states in the Middle East, especially in the Arab world, are many artificial states, which are products of imperialism and power-sharing conflicts between the states that existed in the 19th century and the colonial greed that took no particularities of the region into account. Around a century ago, many Arabic regions were part of the Ottoman Empire. Many historical and political events led to the end of the Ottoman Empire (formally 1924) and the emergence of the new bordered states across the Middle East.

III. The United States and Saudi Arabia

In the thirties of the twentieth century, the U.S. formally built a robust economic and strategic cooperation model with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because of the presence of oil. U.S. policy was able to consolidate its influence in the Kingdom so that the Kingdom became its most important strategic ally in the world. Throughout the century, the Kingdom has become closer to being one of the tools for implementing the U.S. global and regional strategy, rather than an ally who could contradict his ally if this alliance conflicts with his strategic interests [9].

The U.S. adopted a precautionary policy against the Kingdom. This policy was based on measuring the level of quantitative accumulation of the Islamic dimension in Saudi politics in the future and the extent of its ability to influence the position of the U.S. in the Arab and Islamic spheres. From there, it began to lay the foundations and sources of tension that can be moved both within the Kingdom itself or within its geographic territory; the U.S. can use it when necessary [9].

The main interests of the United States in the region are oil supplies. However, friendly regimes' security is not essential when other resources to obtain oil are available. For example, the internal conflict in Yemen is the most critical priority for Saudi Arabia nowadays, as it was in the 1960s. The U.S. administration, however, focuses on oil fields and its transportation routes (the Strait of Hormuz) and it remains silent concerning the ballistic missiles that fall on the Saudi territory. On the other hand, the U.S. shows the most severe reactions to deter attacks targeting oil tankers. This is one of the most critical results when relations are based on interests, not on shared values [10].

The Kingdom was a tool used by the U.S. to balance the Iranian role in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. It was also a tool to settle the situation in Iraq and disputes between the Palestinian factions so they are not contained by Iran. Saudi Arabia was also a tool in the sectarian conflicts provoked by the U.S. in the region within the policy of religious and sectarian fragmentation that the U.S. adopted between the countries of the region. It was a tool to fuel the sectarian conflict between Iran on the one hand and the Arab countries on the other side, and between Sunnis and Shiites within many Arab countries, such as Iraq and Lebanon, and even within the Kingdom itself as a deferred tool that can be used when the U.S. wants [9]. On the other hand, the US-Saudi relations are strategic, and cannot be summed up with an issue, such as the Iranian nuclear file. The Kingdom is important in the game of American and Chinese balance in the Middle East and North Africa [11].

U.S. President Trump 2017 strengthened Saudi Arabia's regional position and weight through partnerships, agreements, and arms sales contracts. Despite Trump's unclear and noisy policy, he attempted to change the international system's rules by requesting the states to pay for their protection, and this is what happened with the Kingdom, for example. However, a close relationship continued between the two sides [11].

Directly, US-Saudi relations are petro-dollar relations,

based on the economy and security, the state of change in the Middle East and the rise and fall of other countries strengthened Saudi Arabia's position regionally, and gave it an opportunity to lead the region and play a larger role in its conflicts, but this can only be done with American support.

IV. The United States and Iran

Since the end of WWII (1948), the U.S. has sought to extend its influence in Iran for economic ambitions. In (1953), both British and American intelligence assisted in toppling the government of the elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mosaddeq to control Iranian oil, which they successfully achieved until the Islamic Revolution in 1979 [12].

Reference [13] says that the U.S. practices the policy of containment and control over all countries that threaten their regional interests, and can confront their desires using hard diplomacy "sanctions", and the use of regional allies in the middle east (the Arab Gulf and Israel) to confront this power and limit its control or relatively independent decisions. He adds that the U.S. was quick to condemn regional powers because they did not comply with the wishes of the U.S., describing them as "rogue", "rebellious" or "outlaw" states. For example, in 1985, President Ronald Reagan stubbornly identified these independent actors when he referred to "a federation of outlaw states - Cuba, Iran, Libya, Nicaragua and North Korea". In short, the United States seeks to prevent the rise of independent-minded regional hegemony. The more independent their behavior, the more pressure the United States will put on them. The more significant the difference in global views of global and regional dominance, the greater the political tension grow between them.

Iran has since wavered its overt or hidden subordination to the West. After the Islamic revolution, its relations with the Soviet Union were regularized. After that, diplomatic crises, hostility and sanctions emerged until Iran was declared in 2003 by President W. Bush as an axe of evil alongside Iraq and North Korea.

After Iran developed its nuclear program, tensions increased between the two sides. In 2015, US-Iran reached an agreement with former President Obama to limit and stop the Iranian program in return of easing sanctions on Iran. Trump administration came in 2018 and withdrew from this agreement, which increased the tension between the two countries and returned matters to their first square. This emphasizes the US policy towards Iran the "contiament" and an extension of the U.S. policy to dominate the region.

Recently, the current scene in the Middle East, the state of chaos in the region, the absence of regimes that are considered as controlling powers (Iraq) and countries in a state of civil war (Syria, Yemen) and the retreat in American policy in the region forced the United States to support its allies (Saudi Arabia and Israel) and use them to limit Iran's interference in the region. The aim of the U.S. policy and the support that it provides for allies (Saudi Arabia and Israel) is to contain Iran and achieve stability in the region in a way that guarantees its interests [14].

The civil war in Yemen is considered an arena of Saudi-Iranian conflict and a proxy war, just like the Cold War. In the spectacles of the decency theory, both Iran and Saudi Arabia strive to be a semi-peripheral state.

V. The United States and Turkey

The U.S. established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Turkey in 1927. Both sides signed in 1947 an agreement on economic and technical cooperation. U.S. considers Turkey a major NATO ally and an important regional partner [15]. Also, Turkey's geographical advantage has earned it strength in the intersection of its security interests with the United States. From this perspective, the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey differs from other countries in the Middle East.

According to the dependency theory, Turkey is considered a semi-peripheral state. Nevertheless, this classification does not mean the United States' absolute acceptance of the role played by Turkey.

Reference [16] in there congressional research service report estimated that the U.S.- Turkish relation would depend on several factors:

> "whether Turkey fully operates its Russian S-400 system*[1]; the influence of various regional crises, (Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Mediterranean disputes with Greece and Cyprus), on Turkey's relationships with key actors (including the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, Israel, Iran, and Sunni Arab states); Turkey ability to project power and create its sphere of influence using military and economic cooperation (including defence exports), and President Erdogan ability to maintain broad control over the country given its economic problems and human rights concerns".

Over the past ten years, the Turkish president has demanded, in his speeches in the United Nations General Assembly, to change the international system's rules and the Security Council rules in particular. In practice, Turkey has begun to take a more significant role in the region; the Syrian issue's interference with the pretext of securing its borders, sending military forces to Libya. This indicates the extent of cooperation and the U.S. green light for these moves. In return, Turkey entered into an economic crisis: the unprecedented decline in the Turkish Lira led Erdogan to pull out of the theory of zero problems that he was adopting. Furthermore, after the missile defense system agreement that Turkey bought from Russia came into effect, the U.S. president publicly threatened to impose sanctions on Turkey.

Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey aim to lead the Islamic world within the religion this is clearly in their agenda. The U.S. tried in administration of former President Obama to market Turkey as a moderate Islamic model, this gave another perspective of the scene in the Middle East, and how U.S. plays in the leadership of the Islamic world.

[1] * Missile defense system

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, what is happening in the Middle East is a struggle between the semi-peripheral states covered by the sub-regional power, the U.S.. Each country tries to prove its position, and the U.S. plays a prominent role through its policies in the region, supporting a state and giving it a more prominent role that guarantees its interests.

According to the theory of dependence, the core states seek to control the semi-peripheral states' behavior in a manner consistent with the core states' desires and to safeguards their interests. This is what the U.S. relies on upon through its policies towards Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. Clearly, it is trying to give a more significant role to its major ally, Israel.

The Middle East is dynamic. Wallerstein argues that, in international relations, the new core states must take the place of other weak or falling core states [4]. This does not apply, for example, to Canada. Canada, in the 70s of the last century, was classified as a semi-peripheral state, and today it is a core state. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has a massive stockpile of oil and a huge military arsenal. However, it cannot be classified as a semi-peripheral state, as it is fragile and weak from inside and still depends on the U.S. economically and militarily.

The perspective development of the dependency theory and the access of states to the ranks of semi-peripheral states can be achieved by cooperating with two or more states and forming alliances at the level of regional security. For example, Iran is trying to approach the semi-peripheral state's status to be in control in the region, but the U.S. policies towards it prevent Iran from doing so. Turkey today faces an unstable political and economic situation due to its direct military intervention in some countries' affairs in the region such as Syria, Libya, and Azerbaijan, also the U.S. policies prevent it from obtaining a greater role in the region.

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