Causes of Anti-Americanism in the Middle East

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Abstract
The middle east politics are complicated and multifaceted due to the oil resources in the region and hegemonic interference by the United States. Therefore, as a result of hegemonic interference, Anti-American sentiment espouses a dislike or opposition of the middle eastern citizens to the American government and its foreign policies towards the Middle East. The article critically defines anti-Americanism specifically, focusing on geopolitics and culture of the middle east and the United States. Then, to specify the causes of anti-Americanism in the Middle East, the article discusses the three variables that led to negative perceptions of Middle Eastern against the United States. The three variables are United States’ support for Israel, the United States support for other oppressive regimes in the Middle East and the United States’ intervention in domestic affairs in the region.

Keywords: Anti-Americanism, Middle East, Western Culture, Islam

Abstrak
Politik timur tengah rumit dan beragam karena sumber daya minyak di wilayah ini dan campur tangan hegemonik oleh Amerika Serikat. Karena itu, sebagai akibat dari campur tangan hegemonik, sentimen Anti-Amerika mendukung ketidaksukaan atau pertentangan warga negara Timur Tengah terhadap pemerintah Amerika dan kebijakan luar negerinya terhadap Timur Tengah. Artikel ini secara kritis mendefinisikan anti-Amerikanisme secara khusus, dengan fokus pada geopolitik dan budaya Timur Tengah dan Amerika Serikat. Kemudian, untuk menentukan penyebab anti-Amerikanisme di Timur Tengah, artikel ini membahas tiga variabel yang mengarah pada persepsi negatif tentang Timur Tengah terhadap Amerika Serikat. Tiga variabel tersebut adalah dukungan Amerika Serikat untuk Israel, dukungan Amerika Serikat untuk rezim penindas lainnya di Timur Tengah dan intervensi Amerika Serikat dalam urusan dalam negeri di kawasan tersebut.

Kata kunci: Anti-Amerika, Timur Tengah, Budaya Barat, Islam
1. INTRODUCTION
The Middle East is a critical geopolitical region of the current time due to its anti-American sentiments among the citizens and political conflicts all around the region. After the post-cold war era, the emergence of the US hegemony in the region, and particularly after the 9/11 terror attack resulted in Anti-American sentiments in the Middle East. However, some scholars claim that the Anti-Americanism roots back to the 18th Century and shown after the Holocaust of Nazi Germany in 1930s and 1940s. Then, it was intensified during the cold war and kept on increasing afterwards. Following the 9/11 terror in the US, the Middle East was addressed as the region of 'terrorist' and the US President George W. Bush declared 'war on terrorism'. Since then, the United States' involvement in the region, such as invasions of Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq invasion in 2003, 2011 Military intervention in Libya, American-led Intervention in Syria and many American allies have destroyed the lives of millions of people in the Middle East and displaced from their home.

There are many mixed opinions regarding the root causes of anti-Americanism. However, it is essential to investigate the significant roots to provide the general picture of Anti-American sentiments in the Middle East. Therefore, it aims to analyze the US-led major events that increased anti-American sentiments in the Middle East. To set the background, firstly, this article defines Anti-Americanism as a whole, considering the role of the attitude of people all around the world. After introducing the term 'anti-Americanism', it reviews some literature on anti-Americanism focusing on one region: Middle East. Then, to specify the causes of anti-Americanism in the Middle East, the article discusses the three variables that led to negative perceptions of Middle Eastern against the United States. The variables are: United States’ support for Israel, the United States support for other oppressive regimes in the Middle East and the United States' intervention in domestic affairs in the region.

2. Defining Anti-Americanism
Anti-Americanism is commonly characterized as a wide range of hatred, condemnations, prejudices and critiques against the United States by the people all around the world. According to Paul Hollander, in his book, Anti-Americanism: critiques at home and abroad, 1965-1990, "anti-Americanism refers to a particular set of mind, feelings of disgust, hatred and extreme aggression in opposition to the American society or the foreign policies of the United States" (Attarian 1993). The origins of hatred against America dates back to the European projection of America as an uncivilized place, which was spread long before the United States came in global power (O'Connor 2004). A broad definition was given by Rubinstein & Smith (1988) who perceived anti-American sentiments as a hostility that became a part of an indistinguishable attack on the foreign policy, society, culture and values of the United States. Therefore, the term 'anti-Americanism' was emerged as a societal and cultural critique of America and extended against political and economic supremacy when the United States came into a global power.

According to Rubin & Rubin (2002), predominantly after the 9/11 terror attack in the United States, a modern era of anti-Americanism started in the Middle East titled as 'anti-American terrorism' (cited in Morgan 2004). However, the term 'anti-Americanism' can only be rationalized 'if it involves systematic antagonism or a negative reaction to America as a whole' (Toinet 1990, cited in O'Connor 2004). It is also a psychological trend that keeps negative opinions towards the United States and the American Society in general (Katzenstei & Keohane 2007). As a whole, anti-American sentiment refers to detest or loathe attitude towards the United States and their policy, culture, business and their perceptions of perceiving the world besides the United States. All of these are associated with projection of identity and power of America by American that has befallen the greatest tragedy ever
in many countries all around the world. The emergence of Anti-Americanism in the Middle East is one of them.

The anti-American sentiment is global, however, while focusing only on the Middle East, Madkissi (2002) clarifies saying that anti-Americanism is a recent phenomenon fueled by American foreign policy, not hatred towards ancient America of uncivilization. According to Madkissi, the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938 motivated America to play a direct role in the Middle East. The primary strategic stake of America was not Palestine or Syria; instead, it was oil. Also, the main starting point was the American-Saudi relationship, which increased the United States’ involvement in the Middle East. Then, the cold war raised the distrust of US policymakers towards secular Iranian and Arab nationalism as a potentially destabilizing power in the Middle East that could affect the business of America in the Middle East. Therefore, to control the destabilizing situation, the United States supported the absolutist dictatorship of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, despite the disagreement of citizens with Pahlavi regime. Jimmy Carter, President of the United States, praised the ‘leadership of Shah’ saying he turned Iran into ‘an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world’ (Madkissi 2002). Then America helped Shah to establish SAVAK internal security agency that tortured political prisoners (ibid). Therefore, the historian Nikki R. Keddie concluded her study saying that the Iran revolution occurred in 1979 was the result of the American policies in Iran. According to her, the revolution assisted in increasing anti-American feeling among the citizens of the Middle East (ibid).

Likewise, Baxter & Akbarzadeh (2008) claims that anti-Americanism in the Middle East is amplified by US foreign policy in the region, in particular, America’s ‘special relationship’ with Israel. It is blamed that the United States supported Israel to clash against Palestine, or the other Arab world (Baxter & Akbarzadeh 2008). Similar to Baxter & Akbarzadeh, Abdallah (2003) perceives the United States’ political, economic, and military support for Israel assisted in the conflict of Israel with Palestinians and other Arab countries. These are the apparent reason of Anti-Americanism in the Middle East. Politically, each time, the US supported Israel in the conflict of Palestinians and Arab. Economically, Israel is the largest recipient of the United States’ aid in the world especially after September 1970, and in 2017, it was second-largest US aid recipient of $ 3.1 billion (Simmons 2017). The aid is observed as unjust by other Middle Eastern arguing; there are many other countries they require such aid than Israel.

At last, from the military support perspectives by Abdallah (2003), the United States provides sophisticated arms attack helicopters, jet fighters and missiles that are being used to target Palestinians, Lebanese, Iraqi and Syrian people, killing them, destroying their homes, and other infrastructures. The Middle East and Arab believe the US military aid in the United States’ strategy to stay in power and suppress Arab people, rather than to protect Arab countries or to fight for Israel. Besides strategic alliances and the aid support between the US and Israel, another aspect that contributed to raising anti-Americanism is the military bases in Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is also seen as a neo-colonialist attempt at securing US control over Arab oil (Abdallah 2003).

However, Harris (2004) said that the 9/11 attacks in the United States are the result of religion’s teachings and an attempt to become a god and submitting the place to God. The twin towers of America were perceived as idols worshipped by Pagan gods, but the American had used them as a world trade center. Therefore, anti-Americanism among Muslims is the result of protecting the religion (cited in Enayat 2012). Similarly, Gerges (2009) also claims that religion plays a vital role in increasing feelings of anti-Americanism in the Middle East. On the other hand, Holmes (2007) argues that the 9/11 attacks can be explained without mentioning Islam religion. For instance, Holmes claims
the twin towers attack was not motivated by religious faith; instead a radical anti-Americanist Islamist targeted them as it was taken as the symbol of American pride (cited in Enayat 2012).

3. Causes of anti-Americanism in the Middle East

This section discusses three significant causes of anti-American sentiments in the Middle East. They are the United States' support for Israel, the United States support for Oppressive regimes in the Middle East and the United States' intervention in domestic affairs in the region.

3.1 The United States' support for Israel

From the western perspective, creating the state of Israel represented Jewish national redemption because of the European anti-Semitism after the Holocaust and because of the centrality of the Jewish presence in Palestine. However, from the Arab perspective, destroying Palestinian community and displacing Arab inhabitants was unjust as the land had the majority of Arab people for over a thousand years. The Arab perceives the United States is entirely supportive of Israel's point of view in the Arab-Israel conflict (Abdallah 2003). If it were not the American generous military support, Israel would have been unable to defeat Arab armies (ibid).

The reason of support is that America takes Israel as the closest ally and reliable strategic partner in the Middle East to control the area. Therefore, America's such support for Israel is widely seen as an unfair at the expense of the Arabs. As a result, hostility was generated against America.

Moreover, Arab blames that the United States always condemns on the killing of Israelis by Palestinian but not the other way around (ibid). Similarly, it is also blamed that America uses double standards to deal with nuclear weapons issues in Israel and the Arab world.

3.2 The United States' support for oppressive Regimes

One of the accessible sources of anti-Americanism among the people of the Middle East is the support for some oppressive Arab regimes by the United States. Ever since the Second World War started, the United States has supported the autocratic regimes in the Middle East providing a large amount of economic and military aid which helped them to stay in power. During that period, the United States' support for some oppressive regimes was taken as a cold war strategy to safeguard the Soviet influence in the region and ensure oil Supply (Khalidi 2009, cited in Goldstein 2009). Therefore, many in the Middle East question the United States commitment to democracy and freedom, blaming the country as a country of hypocrisy and double standards (ibid).

Saudi Arab was the first Middle Eastern country that was strategically important because of their richness in oil. The United States' support to authoritarian regimes of the Arabian Peninsula was at the cost of regime support in pro-US oil policies (Cummins 2012). Later, it was also blamed that the United States enjoyed the privileges in the rights of military bases and controlled over other business and ignored the Arab's domestic policies of rigorous and fundamentalist version of Islam called Wahhabism (ibid). Therefore, this hegemonic attitude of the United States fueled anti-Americanism among the Islamists. Similarly, According to Khouri, after the 9/11 attacks, Arab states' have preferred to participate in the war against terrorism that has suffered a regression in human rights (cited in Abdallah 2003) and heightened anti-American sentiments among the people in the region. Likewise, Teimourian argues that the feeling of anti-American sentiments in the region reflects the Middle Eastern's dissatisfaction with their governments. He further says the people of the Middle East see their governments as a most corrupt, and authoritarian in the power of the United States' billions of Dollars (cited in Abdallah 2003). When Arab citizens try to enjoy their desire of national freedom, it shatters, and frustration takes into the ultimate stage because the American support for their governments and the heavy influence of western culture in the Middle East restrict everything. Hence,
it is natural to have anti-American sentiments among such people who are suppressed by their government but with the help of another country.

3.3 The United States’ intervention in Domestic Affairs in the region

The United States heightened its position in the Middle East in 1957 with the Eisenhower doctrine that assured US aid or military forces to a country being threatened by outside elements (Abdallah 2003). This doctrine was aimed at keeping Soviet influence out of the Middle East by maintaining the status quo. The situation in Lebanon began to get worse following the Suez crisis in 1956 when Lebanon’s Christian President Chamoun refused to break diplomatic relations with Israel, France and Britain which was not accepted by Egyptian President Nasser. Nasser was Arab Nationalism advocate of that time. President Chamoun’s pro-American orientation was also not welcomed by the Muslims citizens and some Christians of the region. Hence, the violence continued and turned into a civil war, aiming to overthrow Chamoun from the ruling by the majority of Muslims and minority of Christians (ibid). However, the United States supported Chamoun sending military assistance, and the war was ended in 1958. After that, the situation in Lebanon was not stable, and America intervened the country again in 1982.

The United States saw the gulf war as an opportunity to show their military power and increase the influence in the Middle East. The Regan administration did a series of intervention in the Middle East. It began with Lebanon intervention in 1982, military bombings in its dispute to Libya and its demonstration of power in many internal affairs in the Middle East provoked Anti-Americanism. As a response, in 1983, a suicide bomber incident occurred in the US Marine barracks killing 241 American troops. Many Islamist in the Middle East were dissatisfied by the American presence in the Middle East. As a result, Al Qaeda was built in the 1990s and many networks later. Similarly, the Clinton administration also ordered airstrikes in 1993 to 1998 following Iraq's refusal to comply with UN nuclear inspectors. These interventions throughout the 1990s were another source of anti-Americanism as the interventions were devastating Iraqi citizens which had nothing to do with the Saddam regime and Nuclear weapons.

4. Conclusion

Anti-Americanism in the Middle East has been determining factors of US-Middle East relations and the subject of significant concern on both sides. Middle Eastern public see US economic, political and military aid in Israel is biased policies towards the Arab-Israel conflict that led anti-American sentiment. This article argues aggressive American policies towards the Middle East, including airstrikes, sanctions, military bases and the US intervention in many countries of the Middle East linking as provoking factors of anti-Americanism. After the discussion in the causes of anti-American sentiments, it can be concluded that Middle Eastern Sentiments in the region is neither fixed nor static and irrational. Instead, their attitude of anti-Americanism primarily results in America's blind support to Israel, and hostile American policies towards other nations of the Middle East. In my point of view, if those policies change by the United States, so will Middle Eastern perceptions and attitudes because the problem of Middle Eastern citizen is American policy and government attitudes, not the citizens of America. If America solves the Arab-Israeli conflict, ending military support to some authoritarian regimes, supporting democratisation and respecting the sovereignty of Middle East, anti-Americanism ends.
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