



ISLAMIC IDENTITY, OIL AND GLOBAL INSECURITY – AFIRMING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: For more than Six decades, Saudi Arabia has suffered criticism from its citizens for indulging with the United States of America; with whom it sustains a sound military alliance since 1943. The vulnerability arising from interdependence on Oil between the two seems to make both entities insensitive to socio-political sensitivities generated by a clash between their respective ideas, values and principles. The attendant hostility from Islamist ideologists and radicals, till date remains a compelling issue to global peace and security.

This article therefore studies Oil as the key geopolitical element among other intermingling factors, interests and goals in oil rich regions with particular reference to the Middle East. It is to reveal that protracted acts of terror and consequent global insecurity drive impetus from the "do or die" struggle for access and control of oil wells and its uninterrupted supply to the global market.

Keywords: Oil; Civilization; Identity; Terrorism; Moral questions; Quandary; Interdependence.

INTRODUCTION

As postulated by Huntington, a civilization refers 'to a socio-political entity, with a people of common cultural identity, a shared history and an agreed system of values. Similarly, Melko argues that Civilizations can be characterized and distinguished from one another through the composition and the nature of relationships within them.¹ They may therefore be seen as unique cultural entities with internal political organizations to protect them from alien penetration.

The United States of America and Saudi Arabia in the above regard, hold opposing truth claims about the nature of life on Earth when viewed as distinct civilizations. Similarly, they uphold different ideas, values and principles, which form the laws guiding and guarding their respective ways of life. According to Keohane and Nye, Jr. in

¹ M. Melko, *The Nature of Civilizations*, Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969, p. 2.

their book 'Power and Interdependence', the strong military alliance and economic interdependence between the two countries have generated, since 1949, moral questions and, at times, internal revolt from their respective citizens. The Saudi citizens were concerned about the presence of people they consider infidels on holy lands and found the relationship with the Saud ruling family as a plunder on Saudi riches, corruption and dictation on its rulers, and an American instrument to terrorize its Muslim neighbors (Saudi Arabia).²

The American public on the other hand they (Keohane and Nye, Jr.) further explain sees Saudi Arabia as an oil-rich authoritarian monarchy, resistant to democracy and notorious in the abuse of human rights.³ In spite of the aforementioned sensitivities generated by this relationship in the region and beyond, the relationship between the two has been maintained due to the relevance of oil to global economic prosperity and industrial prowess. Accordingly, it seems rational that economic interdependence between the two civilizations remains superior to any socio-political sensitivity arising from it.

² R. O. Keohane, J. S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Pearson, 2012, p. 43.

³ R. O Keohane, J. S. Nye, *op.cit*, pp. 51-53.

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In the above scenario, it becomes feasible that the exhaustion of oil reserves and continuous decline of world output revealed by Klare, may exacerbate geopolitical frictions caused by local sensitivities in the region. Similarly, since diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral interdependence and other modern legal and economic instruments have remained incapable of ensuring the continuous flow of oil to distant areas in times of war and crises, the

and special operations) to override any socio-political and economic sensitivities arising in the Middle East as revealed by James Adams.⁶

The combination of these elements makes it possible that global security could be greatly influenced by the exhaustion of oil reserves and the ever-increasing demand for oil the world over as indicated in the Global Hubert Peak Forecast of Future Global Oil Output in figure 1 below.

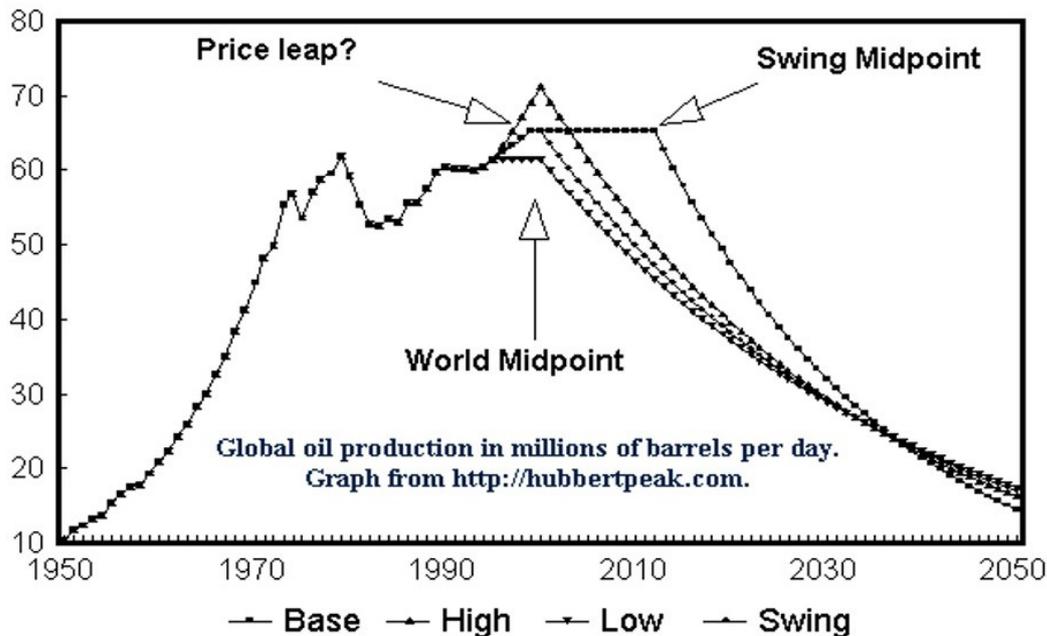


Fig. 1. The Global Hubert Peak Forecast of Future Global Oil Output Source:www.daviesand.com/Perspectives/Forest_Products/Oil_Reserves/

situation leaves the use of force viable in protecting oil reservoirs from protracted assaults by those who abhor the Americans and ensure strategic dominance over the region.⁴

From an understanding of the Islamic vanguard recommended by Syed Qutb against alien penetration in Islamic societies,⁵ it is constructive to argue that acts such as suicide bombing and other forms of violence, targeted against non-combatants, carried out by a person or a group of persons identifiably Islamic, though instigated by the enforcement of Western ideas, values and principles in the region, derive significant impetus from oil politics, which combines with modern trends in warfare (terrorism

The great power struggles over oil, coupled with the "do or die" hankering over control of oil wells in the Middle East as revealed by Klare, the fact that governments lose autonomy for fear of costly effects during economic interdependence as explained by Josef and David coupled with the attendant loss of legitimacy (from respective citizens) revealed by Henry Kissinger, makes it reasonable that Islamist terrorism drives impetus from continued suppression of Islamic sensitivities by a people considered infidels. An objective understanding of this article is intended to assert the relevance of local sensitivities as compelling factors in modern geopolitical thought and global security as proposed by Social Constructivist terrorists.

⁴ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2012, pp. 20-21.

⁵ Syed Qutb Syed, *Milestones*, Kazi Publications, 1964, pp. 12-79.

⁶ James Adams, *Secret Armies*, The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988.



1. Why the Black Gold?

As revealed by Klare, Oil - the black gold - is a fossil fuel found naturally in some geographic locations around the globe. It is a natural energy resource used for various domestic and industrial purposes. Indeed, since the Industrial Revolution and the invention of petrol powered engines, oil becomes increasingly valuable due to the network effects of its uses. For the common man, it is easily observable that oil is used in virtually every aspect of human activity today. Klare citing energy expert Edward L. Morse, asserts that oil is situated at the core of modern industrial economy—a major source of energy and key driver of economic growth.⁷ In transportation, road networks, airlines, warplanes, ships, cars, oil provides 97% of all fuels used today in America. In industries, it provides energy for power plants and serves as a raw material for a wide range of products like plastic, sulphur, etc. Mechanized agriculture and mass production of food also relies heavily on it for energy. In the domestic front, the generation of electricity for heating and lighting homes and schools largely depends on fuel.⁸

Oil candidly deserves the title of “the most versatile and important raw material ever discovered” as tagged by Klare. Similarly, Amuzegar highlights that beyond its economic uses, oil plays a vital role in the national security of a country. Military equipment such as naval ships, war planes, armored vehicles and other fighting machines remain entirely dependent on petroleum.⁹ Accordingly, man’s dependence on implements powered by oil has continuously increased the capacity to consume it in both developing and developed countries. Its role in sub-urban commerce, agriculture, petrochemicals, and tourism affirms its centrality to the vigor of modern development especially in the first world countries like the USA and its European allies. Accordingly, it becomes obvious that oil forms the backbone of economic, industrial, scientific and social developments as well as military strength for all major and small economies in the world as understood by Michael and Amuzegar among

⁷ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2012, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁹ J. Amuzegar, *Managing the Oil Wealth – OPEC windfalls and Pitfalls*, I.B. Taurus Publishers, 2001, p. 10.

others. The survival, growth and vibrancy of contemporary economic development and power of America in fact depend on oil as asserted by the former US Secretary of Energy Abraham Spencer (cited in Klare).¹⁰ Energy expert Edward L. Morse argues that oil is situated at the core of modern industrial economy – a major source of energy and key driver of economic growth and forms 40% of America’s total energy supply.¹¹

Sequel to the above, oil candidly deserves the title of “the most versatile and important raw material ever discovered”. Robert E. Ebel of the USA Center for Strategic and International Studies concluded since 2002 that oil is the determinant of well-being, national security and international power – it fuels military power, national treasuries and international politics. Accordingly, the global economy remains, as it was in the early 1970s, heavily dependent on the stability in the oil market. Oil trade is reported to be the single largest of global economic trade.¹² Since World War II, shortage of oil in the global market has been responsible for all major economic recessions. The Arab oil embargo in 1973-74 and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), caused severe economic contractions around the world price increases caused severe economic downturn in the global economy, leading to inflation and unemployment. In the 1990s, the Gulf War had a similar effect while oil shortages also set the lingering economic downturn early in the 21st century.¹³

2. The Never Ending Quandary

As viewed by Klare, ever since the Industrial Revolution in the early 18th century and the discovery of oil – in the mid-19th century, consumption of oil to serve the needs expressed earlier in this research exponentially increased the demand for oil as more and more countries became industrialized.¹⁴ As mentioned briefly earlier, increasing dependence on technology and

¹⁰ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2012, p.10.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹² A. Steve Yetiv, *op. cit.*, p.18.

¹³ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, p. 9.

¹⁴ M. T. Klare, *Resource wars*, Henry Holt and Company, 2002, p. 15.



modern implements has created an ever-increasing capacity to consume oil in contemporary world. Because oil is efficient, powerful and abundant, it became an indispensable commodity to the life of modern 'Hydro carbon man' as dubbed by Daniel Yergin in *Yetiv*.¹⁵ The demand for oil to cope with surging economic growth in emerging economies like China and India among others has doubled oil consumption in the last 30 years. According to Klare in his book 'Blood and Oil', the use of energy driven from oil for the operation of military equipment such as naval ships, war planes, armored vehicles and other fighting machines has been responsible for the military dominance of the success of Western Civilization and its allies over others during World War II.¹⁶ Klare also mentioned in another of his books 'Resource wars' that the military capability of great armies of the world depends on high quantities of oil for their survival.¹⁷ The significant combat presence of the United States of America in South-East Asia and its other overseas commitments as reported by Klare, are supported by about as much fuel as consumed by the state of Sweden.¹⁸ The emergence of new economic dynamos during the great worldwide industrial expansion in the post-World War II era was driven by a vast cornucopia of cheap oil in the world market. According to Klare in his book 'The Race for What Is Left', realities revealed by the US Directorate of Energy in 2008 suggest that world consumption rates were the highest in the history of human development and would also rise by 31% between 2008 and 2035.¹⁹ Similarly, data available to the International Energy Agency (IEA) as published in the 2008 edition of the World Energy Outlook cited by Klare, revealed that the average daily output of world oil production is about 82 million barrels of oil per day.²⁰

Issues arising from the above reality emanate

¹⁵ Steve A. Yetiv, *op. cit.*, p.19.

¹⁶ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, p. 28.

¹⁷ M. T. Klare, *Resource wars*, Owl Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2002, pp. 29-31.

¹⁸ M. T. Klare, *The Race for what is left*, Henry Holt and Company, 2013, p. 13.

¹⁹ M. T. Klare, *The Race for what is left*, Henry Holt and Company, 2013, p. 36.

²⁰ M. T. Klare, *The Race for what is left*, Henry Holt and Company, 2013, pp. 29-31.

from the report that global reserves of oil have been in a relentless decline since the early 1970s. Major oil producers in the 1960s, for example the USA who led the world in output has witnessed a steady decline from the 1970s. USA produced about 9.4 million barrels of oil per day at its peak in 1970 but suddenly, it began a head-down decline in output. By 1985, it was able to produce only 8.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) and by the year 2000, only 4.9 mbpd. Klare observed a similar pattern from other oil producing regions- steady increase, peak and then decline. For example, Venezuela produced 3.5 mbpd in 1998 but only 2.4 in 2009. Russia also produced 12.5 mbpd to about 6 mbpd following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the North Sea, the combined production capacity of the British and Norwegian area of the region reached a peak of 6.1 mbpd in 1999 and is expected to follow suit in the head down decline. The US department of Energy predicted a decline of 2.8 mbpd by 2020 and only 2.6 by 2030.²¹ In this regard, the IEA as mentioned by Klare, collected data from historical production rates of oil reservoirs with more than 500 million barrels of oil known in the world and systematically analyzed it to determine the declining rate of oil output. The results of this exercise revealed that the world oil reserves were declining at a rate of 9.0% per year between 2003 and 2007. This is reflected to a decline of about 4.7 million barrels of oil per day out of the 82 million barrels per day of the world's daily output.²² This reality remains a course for concern to the oil industry. The ability of oil producers to meet the demand of existing industrial powers thus becomes in doubt, raising questions about the continuation of the industrial age as we know it today.²³ This reality indicates the end of the era of abundance in the oil industry.²⁴

Accordingly, it becomes obvious that the decline in the productive capacity of major oil reserves is capable of generating concern to all consumers of petroleum and experts in the industry. The need to discover additional sources of energy or find alternative sources to petroleum to compensate the demand therefore becomes

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁴ Micheal. T. Klare, *The Race for what is left*, Henry Holt and Company, 2013, p. 8.



mandatory for the continued prosperity enabled by petroleum. It becomes no surprise therefore that the diminishing reserves of this vital resource in easily accessible areas heightened the vulnerability of the industrialized and even the new industrializing countries and generated a "do or die" search for new sources of oil to assure continued prosperity. The increasing scarcity of oil has among other efforts, generated a trend in the utility of unconventional oils like tar sands, extra heavy crude, shale oil etc. ignored during the surplus era. IEA has predicted that in the mid of this century, 9% of total world supply will come from these sources as against the 3% it was in 2009. These unconventional sources are however not sufficient to augment increasing demand and have no significant influence on the search for what is left. Similarly, with existing and easily accessible sources being continuously depleted, essential supplies would have to come from risky areas for reasons of geography –like remote and forbidden locations in the Arctic, Siberia and the deep oceans, which would have to be explored at a cost far exceeding any in the past. Klare rightly concludes that the world has entered an era of pervasive oil scarcity²⁵ and that the world slowly but inevitably witnesses the disappearance of several key resources upon which modern industrial civilization has long relied including oil and gas.²⁶

Evidently therefore, the search for oil in risky and hazardous locations represents a significant phenomenon in the concerted efforts by governments and resource firms to gain control over the remaining oil reservoirs in the world. The global drive to discover, control and exploit the world's final reserves is thus driven by the recognition of the inevitable depletion of energy and other resources in the not too distant future.²⁷ It is thus reasonable to argue that consumers seek to gain control over as much as possible of what remains, causing an unprecedented and complex, elusive wave of hideous struggle.²⁸ It is hardly surprising therefore that the major industrial powers as observed by Klare, have taken to an extended and calculated drive to gain control over the world's remaining reserves. Governments and their giant firms or in

partnership he added, have developed ambitious plans to explore uncharted areas and pursue legal claims to disputed territory and develop militaries that can operate in these areas.²⁹

The relationship between oil and global economic prosperity and stability is thus established. Accordingly, wherever the source of oil may be, the actors and interests of the world's major economies e.g. Russia, France, Britain, USA, China, India and Japan, remain visible in the quest for geopolitical influence and control over oil rich countries and regions. However, while diplomacy and economic instruments could be effective in promoting other economic and political goals, only the military can ensure continuous flow of oil from distant arrears in times of war and crisis. It is openly observable that most major oil suppliers in the world are reported to have noteworthy internal stress or certain emerging sources of stress that could escalate in the future.³⁰ Researchers at the World Bank were also reported by Klare in His book 'Resource Wars', to assert that countries with significant amounts of resources were four times more prone to war than those who do not have any.³¹ This assertion makes it undeniable that the Middle East is the most vivid example in this aspect as we will demonstrate in the next chapter.

3. Why the Middle East?

Countries in the Middle East possess about 60% of the total oil reserves on Earth^{32,33}. It is also home to mostly Muslim populated countries.³⁴ Accordingly, with regard to the clash of civilizations theory and the definition of civilization provided by Huntington et al. (2010) who all understand that civilizations are unique entities, with internal political organizations which serve to protect them from alien penetration and a similar understanding by Emile Durkheim who postulated that a civilization is a social milieu

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

³⁰ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, p. 20.

³¹ M. T. Klare, *Resource wars*, Henry Holt and Company, 2002, p.13.

³² J. Amuzegar, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

³³ M. T. Klare, *Resource wars*, Henry Holt and Company, 2002. p. 44.

³⁴ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, p. 2.



that encompasses several number of nations, with each nation, being a particular form of the whole, and the whole (Civilization) being the sum total of cultural assets within a geographical location called its domain,³⁵ we could argue that the domain of the Islamic Civilization holds the vast energy resource that today forms the backbone of the economies of the Western Civilization. It also seems rational that owing to the versatility of oil and the centrality of its cheap and abundant supply to the vigor and growth of industrial economies as elucidated above, the Western economies remain significantly affected by activities in the territory of the Islamic Civilization, which seems more logical for the USA heavy military presence there.

The diminishing reserves and the abundance of oil in the Middle East, seems responsible for the desperate struggle for geopolitical control over the region. John C. Gannon the deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1996 argued that "since much of the oil comes from the Middle East and since approximately 14 million barrels of petrol is commuted from the Middle East through the Strait of Hormuz for onward distribution to the world market every day,³⁶ the United States was compelled for this reason, to keep a close watch on events and remain engaged in the Middle East to safeguard the flow of oil". He urged American policy makers to recognize that US insecurity is proportional to the insecurity of global energy supplies. His argument led American security strategy to pay particular emphasis on oil field protection, defense of maritime trade routes and other aspects of resource security.³⁷

Analytically therefore, due to diminishing reserves and the abundance of oil in the Middle East, the "do or die" struggle for oil in the region and the involvement of great powers like the USA and Russia in political and security issues in the region seems purely predicated on their vulnerability to any interruption in oil trade and their desire to maintain a good relationship with incumbent governments as entities separate from society and not necessarily the interest of legitimate citizens. This is in tandem

with the assertion made by Nye, Jr. and Welch that Economic interdependence generates domestic sensitivities, which bear on moral concerns on practices, attitudes and wellbeing.

In the case of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America, the romance ensued between these two states, thereby affirming the supremacy of economic interdependence over any religious or moral sentiments. This is because neither of the two could do without the other in terms of oil trade and the benefits accruing from it.

In Saudi Arabia, the relationship mentioned earlier began to take effect on the balance between power and legitimacy in the country. Owing to the nature of state supremacy, in spite of the fact that the ruling family derives legitimacy from the *Ulema*, the king's decisions consequently took precedence. The *Ulema* could therefore only participate in political discussions, but could not enforce their legislations on the state of Saudi Arabia unless the King was in agreement of them. In this regard, the disagreement between the *Ulema* and the King of Saudi Arabia emanated from sensitivities regarding the compatibility of Islamic culture and in particular, *Wahhabi* puritanism and modern trends of western enlightenment. In the above regard, intercultural penetration through interdependence between the two, created sensitivities, which began to emerge from the 1920s even before the 1945 agreement commenced.³⁸ For example, in the 1960s, King Faisal Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz faced opposition when a decision was reached to use the new Television technology (obtained from America) in broadcasting within the kingdom. According to Robert Lacey, the *Ulema* contested and disagreed but to no avail: claiming that the act negates the Qur'anic injunctions and has the potential to corrupt society.³⁹ Lacey also added that several *Ulema* were apprehensive of the possibility that rapid socio-political and economic development could endanger Saudi Arabia's Islamic identity especially after the oil boom in the 1970s.⁴⁰ Similarly, the ruling class was advised to harness

³⁸ A. Boyd, Douglas, "Saudi Arabia Broadcasting: Radio and Television in a Wealthy Islamic State," *Middle East Review*, Summer and Fall 1980, p. 20.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 22-3; Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1979), pp. 369-70.

⁴⁰ Helen Lackner, *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (London, Ithaca Press, 1978), pp. 172-212.

³⁵ International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations#External links

³⁶ M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, pp. 2-3.

³⁷ M. T. Klare, *Resource Wars*, Henry Holt and Company, 2002, p.6.



the modern trends of information and technology to further the course of Islam. In the same vein, they were invited to recognize that, foreign presence on Muslim soil remains a ploy to destroy the Islamic Identity through disguises such as Western model academics and sciences.⁴¹

This situation makes it obvious that the identity of the Saudi society was threatened by western cultural penetration maintained for reasons of oil trade. It should be noted however, that the *ulema* did not reject of modern trends of technology; their interest was to ensure strict management of these technologies for the promotion and protection of Islam. With developing trends of Western type modernization, coupled with violation of tax, legal and banking systems which were no longer in tandem with Islamic ethics, attracted concern from the *Ulema* and other citizens. Similarly, the spending pattern of the princesses also attracted concern on their plunder of the Kingdoms riches. The increasing discontentment of the *Ulema* led to the Islamists agitation against a socially perceived Western cultural attack, and the endless mismanagement and waste of national assets and unholy association with American infidels. This was exacerbated in 1979 with a religious uprising in Mecca; challenging the religious legitimacy of the Saud royal family and accusing it of transgressing the bounds permitted by Islam. In this regard, the nature of interdependence between the Western countries and the oil rich ones in the Middle East, it seems rational that the costly effects of interdependence between them, supersedes any socio-political sensitivity expressed by their respective citizens.

Accordingly, control over the oil rich area has thus brought together a complex set of intermingling factors: clash between ideas, values and principles of West and Islam, sectarian crises, boundary disputes, covert power play between the East and the West, etc. In this view, it seems rational that America's ties with Saudi Arabia, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the fact that 15 out of the 19 terrorists were of Saudi origin, highlight a strong link between protracted acts of terror and the struggle for control and access to oil wells in the Middle East. According to the

concept of vulnerability as explained by Welch and Nye Jr. it further seems obvious that, since interruptions in oil supply have in the past made vulnerable and proved detrimental to the vigor of global economies,⁴² the actions of the United States and other great powers in the region remain to a greater extent motivated by oil trade since oil production facilities remain the most targeted by Islamist Terrorists as opined by Yetiv.⁴³

CONCLUSIONS

What becomes clear in this article is that, loss of legitimacy by state, when met with constraining necessity and loss of autonomy to address local sensitivities, makes revolt against it, inevitable. In this regard, it becomes obvious that the identity of society becomes relevant to its security. This is undisputable because as evidenced in Saudi Arabia, Islamic cultural identity, determined what was considered unacceptable behavior and practice from the ruling family. It also expressed the reality that the violation of what is deemed acceptable by society, erodes leadership legitimacy and makes its authority and power illegal.

The heavy presence of Western and allied military forces in the Middle East in a desperate attempt to secure the oil wells and sea routes, remains necessary only to protect foreign oil installations against internally strangulated elements. Western involvement in the Middle East may thus be seen as a calculated risk taken by oil seekers with a view to ensuring the continued supply of oil from the Middle East to the global market, thereby creating commensurate impetus for Islamist terrorist action.

Our recommendation is for the evolution of the state system to include domestic ingredients beyond its contemporary predominant-realm as a unitary entity and sole referent object. This would provide a lasting solution to global peace and security by the regard it would accord to socio-political and economic sensitivities arising from global interdependence. Cultural identity within will be secured by respecting numerous cultural ontologism as against the dictated Western ontology that requires philosophical neutrality. Doing this

⁴¹ Hassan Muhammad Hassan, *Wassa'il Muqawamat al-Ghazu al-Fikri lil-'Alam al-Islami* (Mecca: Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami, 1981), pp. 79-176.

⁴² M. T. Klare, *Blood and Oil*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004, p. 9.

⁴³ Steve A, Yetiv, *op.cit.*, p. 19.



will make it possible for society to be conceived as a referent object in its own right and ensure that, threats to domestic identity become relevant in the formation of strategies for global peace and security.

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