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The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension

Introduction

The theory of regional security complexes developed by B. Buzan and O. Weaver describes the Middle Eastern regional security complex as a standard one, with a polarity determined by regional powers. It is also considered to be a typical conflict formation in terms of amity and enmity, where the politics of security is shaped mainly by interrelations between the regional powers[1]. At the same time, because of its global importance as a world leading oil and gas supplier as well as its geostrategic location, Middle East constantly draws great attention from main international actors including all of the global and great powers. The security of the region is also characterized by much greater, than in most other regions, dynamics and variability of the main issues of conflict.

This is clearly seen when one looks at the main sources of instability in the region and reasons for conflicts in the Middle Eastern states during last few decades. Since the end of the Second World War and during an era of decolonization the Israeli-Arab conflict rose as a central security issue. In the following years, it has to a certain degree absorbed and overshadowed all the other security issues. Since the decade of 1970. it became, however, less intense and important. The Israeli-Arab conflict has been substituted by the Israeli-Palestinian one, which has a completely different character and its actual position in the hierarchy of regional security issues is incomparably lower. Much greater importance shall now be paid to such problems and threats as the Islamic fundamentalism and extremism as well as a growing activity of armed and terrorist groups that base those ideologies. Other central issues include sectarian and ethnic violence, instability of political regimes and weakness of state structures, internal economic and social problems in numerous countries, the regional arms race, or growing conflicts for resources and raw materials.

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[1]   B. Buzan, O. Waever, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of Regional Security*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 55-62.

The theory of regional security complexes

The theory of regional security complexes has been developed by B. Buzan, O. Weaver and is one of the main issues marking out so-called Copenhagen School. The theory assumes that security issues can be grouped around geographically separated regional complexes. As the authors note „Anarchy plus the distance effect plus geographical diversity yields a pattern of regionally based clusters, where security interdependence is markedly more intense between the states inside such a complexes than between states inside the complex and those outside it"[2]. The regional security complex (RSC) is qualified around a group of states with a certain degree of security interdependence, which both, links them internally and differentiate them from surrounding regions. As such the boundaries of RSCs do not have to correspond to the boundaries of traditional geographical or geopolitical regions. Buzan and Waever note that „…RSCs define themselves as substructures of the international system by the relative intensity of security interdependence among a group of units, and security indifference between that set and surrounding units"[3].

The geographical proximity plays a major role here, as security issues rarely affect more distant regions and security interactions are strongest between adjacent states. The interdependence and intensity of security interactions between states within one security complex are most visible in the military, political, societal and environmental sectors, and to a lesser extent in the economic one. Likewise, the similar dangers and security threats occur mostly in specific regions and rarely impact on large distances. Of course „…all the states in the system are to some extent enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence"[4], but still interdependence between actors in the same region is much stronger than between actors from the different regions or between regions as a whole.

The theory of regional security complexes distinguishes four levels of analysis on the study of regional security: domestic, regional, inter-regional and global. The domestic level covers the issues of internal security and stability as well as security threats and vulnerabilities generated by the sub-state actors and their interrelations. On the regional, or state-to-state level, are the security interactions between states within one security complex. This is the level which, in theory, plays a major role in defining the security and where most interactions take place. The inter-regional level is on the other hand less important, because of the nature of system, where interactions between states of different regional complexes are relatively limited. Finally, the global level resembles the influence of global and

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[2]   *Ibidem*, p. 46.
[3]   *Ibidem*, p. 48.
[4]   *Ibidem*, p. 46.

great powers on the given region and their interplay with the regional security structures[5].

The main theoretical tool used to describe the regional differences in the theory of regional security complexes is the concept of securitization[6]. Generally speaking, it assumes that some decision-making centers, described as securitizing actors (governments, political leaders, lobbies, bureaucratic apparatus etc.) start the process of securitization. They do that by declaring that the object of security, which is some particularly protected value (like the state, society, territory, ideology, culture, economy, identity, environment etc.) is existentially threatened. This, in turn, sanctions the use of exceptional measures to protect the object of security. The undertaken actions, so-called securitization move, are addressed to the specific recipient. The recipient needs to be convinced that the object of security is indeed existentially threatened and that the undertaken measures are reasonable, necessary and appropriate to avert the danger[7].

Global and regional powers in a post-Cold War world (changes to the system)

The authors of the RSC theory draw attention to the distinction between super-powers, great powers and regional powers. In their opinion only superpowers influence the system globally, being active in all or almost all regions of the world. Not only are they required to possess the greatest military capabilities and powerful economies to support and exercise their global interest. They also need to recognize themselves as a superpower and be accepted as such by other actors of the international system. They need to play an active role in a process of securitization and desecuritization, as well as being the source of universal values and ideas they spread out on a global scale[8]. The great powers are states able to affect a few selected regions. They do not possess the first-class capabilities in all sectors, although they are usually characterized by a high and balanced level of development of different sectors or unbalanced development of capabilities, with some sectors developed extremely well and some rather poorly. Besides possessing an appropriate military, economic and political potential and being able to influence more than one region, the great power must be recognized as such by other actors and think of itself as more than regional power or a potential superpower. The regional powers possess limited capabilities and are usually able

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5   *Ibidem*, p. 51.
6   More on the theory and concept of securitization in: B. Buzan, O. Waever, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder 1998.
7   *Ibidem*, pp. 36-42.
8   B. Buzan, O. Waever, *op.cit.*, pp. 34-35.

to affect only one region. They tend to play a crucial role in securitization and desecuritization processes in their own particular regions but are excluded from decision-making processes referring to the other regions (even though some of them may think or wish otherwise)[9].

According to B. Buzan and O. Weaver, one of the most important changes in a post-Cold War era is an evolution of the global security system. Of the 2+3 system, with two superpowers (USA and the Soviet Union) and three great powers (China, Europe and Japan) it has turned into the 1+4 system, with the USA as the only remaining superpower and a group of four great powers, which consist of China, the European Union, Japan, and Russia[10]. Authors believe that during the next decades this structure will not change. In their opinion, there is a small probability, that the United States would be deprived of their status of superpower, which would lead to the creation of the system without a nominal global superpower, but with a number of powers of equal rank. Even smaller is the probability that China or the European Union would raise to the role of global superpower, which would result in the reemergence of the system with two superpowers and a number of great powers[11].

Consequences for the Middle East

The region of the Middle East for many centuries was marginalized in the world politics. Circumvented by the main trade routes and insignificant for the economic and political interests of other region's states, it plunged into backwardness and underdevelopment. The renaissance of European interest in the region, which took the form of Orientalism in XIX century, started the slow process of rebuilding ties between the Middle East and the rest of the world. The construction of the Suez Channel and discovery of the huge resources of hydro-carbonates (oil and natural gas) had significantly accelerated this process. In due course of the Second World War and by the end of 1940., the Middle East became the main source of oil for the Western Europe and Japan. At the same period of time, American oil companies took over control of large portion of the region's oil fields and oil production, primarily in the states of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates or Libya[12]. Even though between 1950. and 1970. most of the region's states have nationalized their oil resources, it did not significantly change the situation. The US, European and Japanese markets remai-

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[9]   *Ibidem*, pp. 35-39.
[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 445-446.
[11] *Ibidem*, pp. 446-447.
[12] P. Sluglett, *The Cold War in the Middle East,* [in:] *International Relations in the Middle East*, L. Fawcett (ed.), Oxford 2013, pp. 65-66.

ned their main customers and the technical assistance of the Western oil companies was still needed to drill and refine their oil[13].

The clash of ideologies that accompanied the Cold War and divided many parts of the world into two sides fighting each other, heavily influenced geopolitics of the Middle East. The Soviet Union sought to protect its southern flank by installing there as many pro-Soviet regimes as possible and tried to undermine influences of the Western powers, mainly Great Britain and then the United States, by exploiting the growing anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiments[14]. The United States on their side, fulfilling the assumptions of Truman doctrine, tried to rebuff the Soviet attempts. The Middle East became a crucial area for the strategic interest of both sides. The United States has built their network of regional influences around a group of allied, dependent or client states, which included primarily Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq (until 1958), Iran (until 1979), Israel (since late 1960.), and Egypt (since late 1970.). Of second importance were the smaller states aligned or dependent directly to the US or to one of their major allies in the region, like Jordan, Morocco, Libya (until 1969), Oman, Kuwait, U.A.E., Qatar, Bahrain, North Yemen. Soviet Union supported pro-Soviet or anti-Western regimes and their own client states in Egypt (until mid-1970.), Syria, Iraq (since 1958), Algeria and South Yemen. Soviet efforts to build a coalition of aligned states in the Middle East were severely undermined by the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when a large part of the Muslim world, even the one earlier strongly anti-Western, turned against the Soviet Union[15].

While network of pro-Soviet regimes did not survive the war in Afghanistan and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, system of alliances and coalitions created by the United States proved to be far more durable. Although designed primarily to deter the rise of Soviet influences in the Middle East during the Cold War, it proved to be also useful in extending US interests in the region after its end. In initial period of the post-Cold War era Moscow tried to save the last remnants of their regional influences on regional security by attempts to play an active role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Madrid Conference in 1991), by supporting US-led coalition of states against Iraq during Saddam Hussien's invasion on Kuwait and by developing economic cooperation with some of the

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[13] The agreements between Western oil companies and Arab governments were renegotiated and oil price had raised significantly after the Oil Crisis in 1973. But the economic ties and links between Western and Middle Eastern oil companies in most cases remain strong to this day. G. Bahgat, *United States Oil Diplomacy in the Persian Gulf*, [in:] *Great Powers and Regional Orders. The United States and the Persian Gulf*, M. Kaim (ed.), Aldershot-Burlington 2008, pp. 55-69.

[14] M. Duric, T. Lansford, *US-Russian Competition in the Middle East*, [in:] *Strategic Interests in the Middle East*, J. Covarubias, T. Lansford (eds.), Farnham-Burlington 2010, p. 64.

[15] Since then the only Middle Eastern states with more intensive security cooperation with the Soviet Union remained Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Syria. *Ibidem*, p. 65.

region's states (limited mainly to the arms sales)[16]. All the Russian efforts had a very limited effect and in due course of 1990. the whole Middle East has been affected by a growing domination of the United States.

Reduction in the number of existing superpowers from two to one resulted in an increasing dynamics of regional security in different parts of the world. On the regional level actors obtained more space for acting without interference of the competing superpowers. However, the results of this development are very different in various regions of the world. In case of the Middle East for example the external pressure did not decrease, even though the region is not affected by superpowers' rivalry anymore. On the contrary, it seems that the only existing superpower, the United States, is more than ever interested in dynamics of security in the region.

Character for the Middle Eastern security complex

The Middle Eastern security complex is described by Buzan and Weaver as a typical conflict formation. They draw the boundaries of the region rather traditionally, including to the Middle East all the Arab states plus Israel and Iran. Afghanistan and Turkey play a role of isolators between the Middle East and respectively South Asia and Europe. They exclude from the Middle East, and consequently from the Middle Eastern regional security complex, Sudan, what may raise some concerns, especially after partition of the country in 2011 on Arab-Islamic northern part and Negro-African, predominantly Christian, South Sudan. The Middle Eastern security complex is subsequently divided into three sub-complexes. The first one is Maghreb, consisting of the North African Arab states, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. The Levant sub-complex includes Egypt, Israel with occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan. Finally the Gulf sub-complex includes Iran and all the states of the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates[17].

In this theory, the Middle Eastern regional security complex is characterized by a high dynamics of local conflicts and strong presence of the United States. End of the Cold War and a change of global security system on 1+4 has induced a significant change to this regional security complex, as it has started an ear of unipolar US domination in the Middle East. This domination has seriously changed the balance of power in the region, leading first and foremost to immense rise of power of Israel, isolation of Iraq and Iran, as well as to impairment

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[16]   *Ibidem*, pp. 65-66.
[17]   B. Buzan, O. Waever, *op.cit.*, pp. 187-189.

of the former Soviet Union client states (in particular Syria). At the beginning of XXI century security of the Middle Eastern regional complex was in the interim phase and its security was influenced mainly by rising dynamics of regional and domestic conflicts and a constant domination of the United States on a global level, which was superimposed on a regional one. The peace process in the Levant sub-region and the policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran in the Gulf were the central issues. However, it seemed very likely that the failure of both of them (peace process and dual containment) might lead to the end of interim period and intensify internal dynamics in the Middle Eastern regional security complex[18]. The recent developments seem to prove those anticipations right.

The strategy of dual containment was announced in 1993 by Martin Indyk, then a special assistant for Near East and South Asian Affairs to president Bill Clinton. It proved to be a failure, as it led to taking over the power in Iraq by Shiite majority and in consequence to the rapprochement of this country with Iran. At the same time Israeli-Palestinian peace process stuck fast at the end of 1990. and does not look like it could be reviewed in the predictable future. The Israeli-Palestinian/Israeli-Arab conflict is made, by authors of the theory of regional security complexes, a central point in the dynamics of conflicts in the Middle East, to some extent marginalizing other potential sources of conflicts and security concerns. The authors notice that „…it is no longer the epicenter of region's violence" but conclude that it „… still remains politically and symbolically central"[19]. Although they seem to notice the various religious, ideological, political, ethnic or territorial differences and disputes as a source of numerous local conflicts and threats to security, they still seem to underestimate their importance. This assumption should be considered erroneous as in the recent years Israel has successfully desecuritized the Palestinian issue on the regional level and is now managing the conflict independently without any foreign influences it does not wish or allow. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains at most symbolically important (but not central) to some states in the Middle East and to some other actors of the international community.

Other mistake is a focus mainly on the global, inter-regional and regional level of numerous political and military threats in the post-Cold War era. Meanwhile, the threats on domestic level did not diminish but, to the contrary, became more important than ever before. Both during the Cold War, in the period of US unipolar domination as well as in the interim period, a large number of conflicts had an ethnic, religious or social background and occurred solely on the domestic level. From the Middle Eastern perspective this is clearly visible on many examples. The Iraqi government, led by Saddam Hussein, not only waged war against Iran and

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[18]   *Ibidem*, pp. 203-205, 210-213.
[19]   *Ibidem*, p. 215.

invaded neighboring Kuwait, but also performed ethnic cleansing of the Kurdish minority as well as oppressed and murdered members of the Shiite Muslim majority in their own state. The Alawis, ruling Syria since 1970., did not hesitate to massacre the Sunni Muslims in their own country to stop the spread and rise of Muslim Brothers[20]. The Lebanese Civil War started as a conflict between local and Palestinian Sunni Muslims on the one hand and Lebanese Christians on the other and then took a form of multifaceted war, in which involved were also members of Lebanese Shiite and Druze communities[21]. Also the Shiite communities in the Gulf states had long time since been discriminated and oppressed by the authorities and since they received any substantial political and organizational support from Iran in 1980. they did start to fight back, increase resistance and undertake more serious actions against their oppressors.

Recent developments in the Middle Eastern RSC

The recent development of the security situation in the Middle Eastern regional complex is characterized first and foremost by its increasing dynamics. The period of US unipolar domination has come to an end and in the present interim period we observe the significant decrease in the importance of traditional security issues. The Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts had been efficiently managed and selectively desecuritized by Israel. Today Israel has definitely the most powerful conventional armed forces in the region and as the only Middle Eastern state possesses the nuclear weapon[22]. It is also the strategic ally of the militarily most powerful state in the world, the United States of America. Altogether it makes a threat of a direct attack on Israel by any state or a coalition of states completely abstract. On the other hand, Israel has undertaken the efficient antiterrorist actions aimed at destroying the command structures and military capabilities of the Palestinian militant groups. In combination with the construction of security wall between Israel and the West Bank, isolation of the Gaza Strip and full control over the land, maritime and air borders of the Palestinian territories, Israeli authorities have also minimized the threats posed by Palestinian

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[20]   E. Zisser, *The Syrian Army on the Domestic and External Fronts*, [in:] *Armed Forces in the Middle East. Politics and Strategy*, B. Rubin, T.A. Keaney (eds.), London 2006, pp. 113-114.

[21]   W. Harris, *Republic of Lebanon*, [in:] *The Government and the Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, D.E. Long, B. Reich, M. Gasiorowski (eds.), Boulder 2011, pp. 251-255.

[22]   The Israeli military superiority over any of the Arab states, as well as over any possible coalition of them results from high level of military training, advantage in the quality of armaments, and supreme command, control and battle management capabilities. *The Military Balance 2016*, London 2016, pp. 307-364; A.H. Cordesman, *Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars*, Westport 2006.

national liberation movement. As a result in the last years the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts have lost its previous political role and symbolic importance, and the Palestinian question is now only occasionally raised by anyone else than the Palestinians themselves.

Likewise other traditional security issue in the Middle Eastern regional complex, the threats generated by aggressive and unpredictable dictators and authoritarian regimes, is now fading away. With Saddam Hussein ousted in 2003 and several other potentially dangerous authoritarian leaders overthrown or cornered by the wave of popular revolts in the Middle East in 2011, the danger they posed is no longer a major problem. The trouble-making dictatorships and single party regimes in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia or Yemen, classified as „bunker states" and „bully praetorian states"[23] had been destroyed or significantly weakened. It is not to be expected, that the overthrown dictators will be substituted by more peaceful or stable political regimes[24]. In fact this seems to be only the case of Tunisia, where after the deposition of president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the new leadership was able to hold a just and fair election. The newly chosen Tunisian authorities seem to do well so far, and the Tunisian revolt of 2011 is the only one which brings positive results[25]. In most other states destruction or weakening of ruling authoritarian regimes has generated more security threats to the Middle Eastern regional complex, then it has eliminated.

One of the most challenging threat is undoubtedly the new impulse it has given to the renaissance and rising popularity of Islamic fundamentalist ideologies, which more and more often takes the form of religious radicalism and turn into violent actions. Decline of the colonial era and the period of decolonization in the Middle East had been ideologically dominated by pan-Arabism and various other socialist and nationalists movements. Most of those secular ideologies were discredited, both in economic and political dimension, as they were unable to offer any credible solutions for the most serious problems of the Middle Eastern societies. This opened an ideological gap which since 1970. started to be filled in by, already existing but so far marginalized, ideologies based on the politicized form of religion[26]. The politicization of religion and making it a tool of ideological struggle led to the rising tensions between religious and secular societal groups in many parts of the region. It also led to the outbreak of hostilities between believers of different faiths and religions. Many of those animosities, like the Sunni-Shiite enmity, were traditional patterns of rivalry, but for a time being remained

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[23] C.M. Henry, R. Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, New York 2011, pp. 113, 162.

[24] R. Owen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 184-191.

[25] K. Bahgat, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-96.

[26] R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics In the Making of the Modern Middle East*, London 2008, pp. 154-174.

a marginal problem. One of the first victims of this new and increased outbreak of Sunni Muslim radicalism are also the Middle Eastern Christians, who became the target of many attacks mainly in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt[27].

The era of everlasting dictators has come to an end in the Middle East. Authoritarian leaders, who ruled their states for a few decades, like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, Ali Abdallah Salah in Yemen or Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia had been overthrown by foreign interventions (Hussein) or by their own societies during the Arab Spring[28]. So far only in Tunisia, the old regime was replaced by a new one which seems to be predictable and guarantee stability. In other states, the situation is more or less uncertain and insecure. In Egypt after the first in history of this state democratic election the power came to the Islamic group of Muslim Brothers and one of its leaders, Mohammed Mursi, became a president. However, in June 2013 they were deprived of power in a military coup, by a group of officers related to the old regime. The leader of the coup, Marschal Abdul Fattah as-Sisi, became a new president[29]. The Muslim Brothers were declared a terrorist group, thousands of members were arrested and hundreds sentenced to capital punishments. This had temporary pacified situation in the country, but it may easily get out of control in the near future. In Iraq since the withdrawal of US forces in 2011 security situation deteriorated constantly and tensions between the rivaling Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish groups were rising which led to emergence of ISIS and outbreak of civil war in 2014[30]. The interim government that took power in Libya after the overthrow of Qaddafi, was not able to control the capital city, not to mention the rest of the country. The state plunged into chaos and internal fights between different armed gangs, tribal militias and sectarian militant groups. In Yemen ousted president Salah was replaced by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, but the change has been contested by part of the society and political forces related to followers of Zaydi-Shiite sect (mainly from the group of tribes know as Houthis). This has led to internal strife between Houthis, local Sunni Muslim population and radical Islamists (including Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and militants pledging loyalty to ISIS). In March 2015 a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia started a military intervention (code named *Decisive Storm*) to support president Hadi and his Sunni followers against Iranian-backed Houthi forces[31]. In Syria

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[27] R. Flamini, *Forced Exodus: Christians in the Middle East*, „World Affairs" 2013, November/ December, http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/forced-exodus-christians-middle-east (14 XII 2016).

[28] K. Selvik, S. Stensile, *Stability and Change in the Modern Middle East*, London 2011, pp. 177-181.

[29] *Egypt: Abdul Fattah al-Sisi profile*, BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19256730 (14 XII 2016).

[30] J. Stern, J.M. Berger, *ISIS. The State of Terror*, London 2015, pp. 13-32.

[31] *The Military Balance 2016*, London 2016, pp. 314-316.

president Basher al-Assad managed to retain power but since 2011 the country is torn by a bloody civil war. The multilateral and complex conflict in Syria involves local ethnic and religious groups (Sunni, Shiite and Alawi Muslims, Christians, Druze and Kurds), numerous regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Qatar, Lebanon) as well as many great and superpowers (the USA, Russia, some EU member states)[32].

On the inter-regional and global level one of the most important recent developments in the Middle East is the rising influence of other external powers. The growing oil import and risingn concerns about energy security in China and other Asian states had brought their interests to the sub-region of the Gulf. In the coming years this will presumably become a serious challenge to the present US domination there[33]. To underline the importance of the region to the US interests and ensure American domination there, the United States do not only extend their political influence in the Gulf states, but also project their power by keeping a significant military presence. In the recent years in the different military bases and other temporary and undisclosed locations in the Middle East stationed some 30 to 50 thousand American soldiers[34].

A case study of Sunni-Shiite rivalry as a rising threat in the Middle Eastern RSC

One of the security issues underestimated in original consideration on the Middle Eastern RSC, which definitely needs to be reconsidered and treated more seriously, is the Sunni-Shiite hostility. It is not a new phenomenon in the Middle East, but for a long time it has not been a key problem or a main concern for the region's societies. For various reasons it started to gain importance more or less since the end of 1970s. Mutual relations between Sunni and Shiite Muslims are influenced by many factors, including the populations in different states, current domestic and international political situation, actions undertaken by external actors etc.

One of the most important factors was undoubtedly an Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, which raised to power Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and a theocratic regime based on the rule of Shiite clergy. In Iran, Shiite Muslims constitute a majority of 89% of almost 80 million of country's population[35]. As a world's

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[32]   R. Slim, *Can Anyone Stop the Syrian War?*, „Foreign Policy", 12 IX 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/12/can-anyone-stop-the-syrian-war-us-russia-ceasefire-spoilers/ (23 XII 2016).

[33]   J. Calabrese, *Sino-Gulf Relations and the United States: Dark Cloud – Silver Lining?*, [in:] *Great Powers…*, pp. 241-261.

[34]   J. Jarząbek, *Military Balance in the Gulf – an overview*, „Wschodnioznawstwo" 2014, pp. 202-204.

[35]   *CIA Factbook. Iran*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html (14 XII 2016).

biggest Shiite state Iran is a natural leader and supporter for the Shiite Muslim communities in other countries. This provokes numerous tensions on the regional scale and causes distrust of Iran, especially in the Gulf Arab states inhabited by Shiite minorities. The situation of Sunni minority in Iran itself did not deteriorate significantly since the Islamic Revolution, as Ayatollah Khomeini consistently preached for the need of unity among all Muslims. Cases of repressions and discrimination were more often an offshoot of the Iraqi-Iranian War (1980-1988) or had rather an ethnic than religious background[36].

In the recent years Sunni-Shiite conflict shows its most bloody face in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Iraq is inhabited by a three different ethnoreligious groups: the majority of Shiite Muslim Arabs, who constitute some 60% of its population and two minorities of Sunni Muslim Arabs (around 20%) and Kurds who are mostly Sunni faith (also around 20%)[37]. During the Ottoman period, British Mandate and in early years of Iraqi independence the power was dominated by Sunni Arabs, who controlled the state apparatus and military forces in Iraq. Iraqi Shiites were discriminated and marginalized, and this process intensified since the beginning of 1980., when Saddam Hussein came to power[38]. After the deposition of Saddam Hussein in 2003 the US government imposed a new constitution and attempted a top-down democratization of the state. In consequence, the power in the country was taken over by Shiite majority, which easily won the elections. Unfortunately, the government of the prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, who ruled the country since 2006, was not only incompetent and inefficient but also eager to repay all the wrongdoings to the Shiite Muslims by discrimination and marginalization of the Sunni minority. This was one of the main reasons for the rising tensions, increasing number of terrorist attacks, outbreak of armed struggles, development of ISIS, and the full-scale civil war since 2014.

The large-scale violence in Iraq provoked by the radical Sunni militant group (ISIS) almost led to the collapse of local state structures. The organization, which originates from a number of insurgent groups established in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003, was initially a small terrorist cell. It was able to strengthen and develop its military capabilities after 2011 during the civil war which broke out in Syria[39]. In 2016 the new Iraqi government of prime minister Haider al-Abadi was able to consolidate and strengthen the armed forces and with the support of US-led coalition of states on the one hand and Iran of the other started to fight back and reclaim the territories previously lost to ISIS. The war is, however, far

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[36]   Mainly due to a fact that most of the Sunni Muslims in Iran belong to Kurdish or Balochi ethnic groups who occasionally raised arms to fight for their own independence or authonomy. M. Gasiorowski, *Islamic Republic of Iran*, [in:] *The Government…*, pp. 68-69.

[37]   J.S. Yaphe, *Republic of Iraq*, [in:] *The Government…*, p. 144.

[38]   R. Owen, *The Rise…*, pp. 111-113.

[39]   J. Stern, J.M. Berger, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-52.

from over and bridging the gap between Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis will will last for generations if at all possible.

Syria itself is the other Middle Eastern front where Sunni and Shiite Muslims wage a bloody war. The country has been inhabited mainly by the Sunnis (74%), with significant minorities of Shiite sect – Alawites (12%), Christians of various denominations (10%) and Druze (3%)[40]. The Alawites minority played a key role in ruling the country ever since the times of French Mandate and totally took over the power since 1970 when Hafez al-Assad became prime minister and then president of Syria. Marginalized politically and disadvantaged economically Syrian Sunnis tried to oppose the government with different intensity. But only the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 ignited the mass wave of social protests, which then turned into a full-scale Civil War being fought in Syria since then. In Yemen the population consist of Sunni majority (65%) and Zaydi-Shiite sect (35%). Longstanding conflict between the two erupted again after 2011 when mass protests of the Arab Spring sparked the political changes and toppled president Salah. The conflict in Yemen is also an obvious example of a proxy war between two regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which support their local allies (Zaydi/Houthi tribes and Sunnis respectively). This external support not only fuels and intensifies the conflict in Yemen but may also lead to its expansion on the other states as well as cause a potentially disastrous direct war between Tehran and Riyadh.

The increasing tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims already lead to an intensification of conflicts in other states of the Middle East. The situation in Bahrain resembles somewhat the one from Iraq from the period of Saddam Hussein. The Shiite majority (70%) is ruled by a royal family of Al-Khalifa, the dynasty belonging to the Sunni minority. Not allowed to take more important positions in state apparatus and army, the Shiites became second-class citizens[41]. Their discontent is rising and occasionally erupts in waves of anti-governmental protests which in turn are brutally suppressed by Bahrain authorities with the support of Saudi Arabia. In other Gulf states Shiites consist a minority, which number varies from 25% in Kuwait, 20% in Qatar, 16% in the United Arab Emirates, and 10% in Saudi Arabia. In each of those states, the power remains in the hands of Sunni majorities and the Shiites are discriminated in political, economic, and social life. In the last years those Shiite minorities are also under the rising influence of Iran, what intensifies the distrust between them and the local governments and increases antagonisms.

In Lebanon, the main traditional line of religious division runs between local Sunni Muslim and Christian populations. The Lebanese Shiites, a mainly rural

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[40]   B. Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary politics in the Middle East*, Cambridge 2008, p. 234.
[41]   J. Crystal, *Eastern Arabian States*, [in:] *The Government…*, pp. 174-175.

community with low level of internal organization, for a long time were not involved in the sectarian conflicts. Since the outbreak of Lebanese Civil War in 1975 however, hostility between Lebanese Shiites and other religious groups were rising. This resulted in creation of Shiite political and military organizations (Amal and Hezbollah) and their full engagement in the internal conflicts in Lebanon. In recent years situation worsened further because Lebanese Shiites and Sunnis support opposite sides of war in the neighboring Syria.

Conclusions

The Sunni-Shiite hostility is one of the most underestimated security problems in the previous analysis of the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex. Although important only for just two of its three sub-regions (Levant and the Gulf, irrelevant for Maghreb) it is a growing threat to the security on domestic and regional level. From perspective of the theory of securitization the Sunni-Shiite hostility may take slightly different forms in individual states, but shares many common features and patterns of enmity. The securitizing actors are usually political or spiritual leaders, states' authorities, clergy, radical political and religious organizations or traditional and conservative social groups. The object of security, which is endangered and needs to be exceptionally protected, is Sunni or Shiite religious identity of the given society, threatened by the influence of competitive religion. This justifies the use of extraordinary measures, that range from strict supervision of the followers of other religion, their political, economic, and/or social discrimination, to the use of armed force, forced displacements and even physical elimination.

Abstract

Jarosław Jarząbek

The Theory of Regional Security Complexes
in the Middle Eastern Dimension

The article investigates recent developments and changes to the Middle Eastern regional security complex. The regional security complexes theory (RSCT) assumes that security problems rarely impact on large distances and that similar threats occur mostly in specific regions. According to RSCT, the Middle East is a typical conflict formation, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iraqi crisises being the biggest problems and most serious threats to the regional security.

The author argues, however, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does no longer play a major role in the regional security, and the recent crisis in Iraq, although still important, has completely different character than it had previously. Security of the Middle Eastern regional complex is now shaped and challenged by a different set of factors. This includes primarily the impact of the rising Sunni-Shiite hostility, growing popularity and importance of Islamic fundamentalism, as well as the instability and unpredictability of local political regimes.

Keywords: Regional security complex theory, Middle East, conflict formation, security threats, securitization, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraqi crisis, Sunni-Shia hostility, Islamic fundamentalism, instability of political regimes

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