

# Ideology: Factors of Conflict and Failure in the Middle East

Hasbi Jabbar

Qassim University

Email: [jabbar4@gmail.com](mailto:jabbar4@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The following article discusses how Western ideology is a major factor in the occurrence of conflict and state failure in the Middle East. In this article, the author examines the perspective of ideological hegemony. The ideology destroys the political and economic system that is at the root of social inequalities, thus accelerating the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East. The author cites Syria and Libya as examples to prove the driving factors of the conflict. The author argues that the main cause of the conflict in the Middle East is the influence of Western ideology which has not been accepted by both those in power and society, which has led to divisions and even wars. Democracy is an accepted model in many countries that cannot be applied in the Middle East. The author also criticizes the failure of the implementation of democracy and the liberal economy in the Middle East.

**Keywords:** *Ideology, Modernism, Imperialism, Capitalism, Democracy, Middle East.*



## A. INTRODUCTION

Amidst various global advances, conflicts and wars are constantly on the agenda in various corners of the world, especially in the Middle East, which has been a land of disputes for various civilizations for centuries. The Middle East, which has inherited various ethnicities, religions and cultures, is often like a mixture of dough that has never finished being cooked. Coupled with the political order in each region which resembles the pharaoh in the past. Power tempts every ruler for the luxury obtained from oil resources. So much so that it has made the oil-rich Middle East a place of bloodshed since the birth of human civilization. In fact, the Middle East is now built with conflict, Islamic fanaticism and even terrorism. On the other hand, the Middle East is also glorified as the cradle of various civilizations with a wealth of cultural culture, natural resources, a center of luxury, and a charming and expensive life.

The Middle East, which has been a zone of conflict for centuries, is very difficult to become again the "Middle East" of which the world community dreams. Differences in ethnicity, religion and socio-economic disparities have made this region an area prone to conflicts between religions and ethnic groups and power struggles between certain ethnic groups. Not to mention the added element of natural wealth like oil which is a major factor in dividing the country. The ideology that was left behind by the West

during the French and British mandates in this region only reached the point of establishing an autocratic state, which was largely controlled by a small part of the family inherited from colonialism. So that Western ideology, in particular “democracy”, becomes the main weapon to overthrow the regime that the world capitalist system does not want.

Basically, ideological conflicts only occur between ideologies of capitalism and regimes that do not support global capitalism. Like the socialist regime and communism. The Middle East continues to experience conflict as long as hegemonic ideology becomes a benchmark in state policy. Where Western ideologies become political motivations wrapped in elements of democracy, Islam and even ethnic nationalism. Various political elements are used as sentiment to build the identity of a nation in the state. These elements are actually dividers that cause wars with different ethnic groups and religions. The author argues that the Middle East will never be stable because Western ideologies such as the democratic regimes that have developed in this region do not match the background of the people. Both in terms of religious, cultural and cultural values and for the political system. The conflicts that arise in the Middle East are the responsibility of the international community and must provide concrete solutions. Because it is time for the peoples of the Middle East to accept their prosperity and their future.

The author sees the phenomenon of conflict occurring in the Middle East from the perspective of Gramsci's critical theory. The ideology developed is a thought that dominates power and only represents the interests of certain groups. So ideologies such as democracy, liberalism and capitalism are ideas that only provide economic interests to certain groups. For example, the ideology of “democracy” used by the western capitalist ruling group to overthrow the Libyan Gaddafi government in an effort to win over capitalist ideology and also natural resource interests. Therefore, all aspects of life are shaped according to the interests of certain groups. This causes the hegemonic ideological culture to dominate certain groups.

## **B. METHOD**

The research was conducted using qualitative methods. With this qualitative method, researchers attempt to reveal the universal essence of phenomena personally experienced by a group of individuals in depth. Data was collected using several techniques, including observational techniques, focus group discussions, and literature reviews. Data analysis was carried out through three analytical processes, namely coding,

merging of codes that emerged into themes, verification of themes through theory and follow-up interviews, and conclusion (Creswell , 2010).

### C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Modernism is a phenomenon that developed in Europe until the birth of the Enlightenment of the Renaissance). This phenomenon is a thought revolution that encourages people to think freely and in a modern way. So that it gave rise to the bourgeoisie/aristocratic class which came up with the idea of establishing a modern-state very different from the previous monarchical system of power. The development of civilization in Europe gave rise to mercantilism and capitalism, which pushed the European bourgeoisie to become a colossal colonialist by supplying needs and taking greater capital until the outbreak of World War I and World War II. world.

The growing variety of needs brought about by Britain's Industrial Revolution encouraged maritime explorers to ship raw materials to all corners of the world. The need for raw materials and the industrial developments that took place over several centuries in Europe, both economically and ideologically, changed the thinking of the European nation, both in the way of life and in the politics which gave rise to nationalism. and liberal democratic practices. But did all of these same things happen in the “Middle East ”?

The region, which is often known as the Middle East, has never seen an enlightenment like what happened in Europe or the industrial revolution that happened in England. The region that was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks until World War I is just a place where ancient civilizations were born and took place. However, after the last heir to Muawiyah was wiped out by the Ottoman Empire, this area was a stopover for Lavantine merchants from Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan (Shea, 2003). After the Ottoman Turks lost power in the region in the 19th century, this area became new ground for European colonialism. Great Britain and France absolutely after the First World War made this region a territory. Then, after the end of the Second World War, it was inherited by the family from ex-colonialism to become the ruler of this region.

Historically, the Middle East is very different from Europe. Europe which has progressed both in its economic and political systems, this region is only a part which is under the domination of Empire and colonialism. This region has therefore never been the center of progress, but the Middle East has become only a “peripheral” part. The Middle East has traditionally developed with its own cultural and ideological richness. The cradle of various religions and ultur which are rooted in religious values. So the developments taking place in the Middle East are very opposite to what is happening in Europe. The ideology that developed in Europe was different from that which developed in the Middle East. The Middle East is filled with various tribes, races and densely packed cultures, making this region oil and water that can never be combined. So

Western ideology, especially democratic rule, becomes a threat to autocratic power (the power of a family) that is passed down from generation to generation.

"Middle East" has been the term for East of West (Europe) for Western colonies since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. The Middle East has never been a terminology that describes its exact geographical location. Because the Middle East is not a region that can be marked physically. The mention of the Middle East is the designation of a western country that is geographically positioned as the center of the world. After World War I, "Middle East" was the European colonial term for the Eastern Empire of the Ottoman Turks. In various literatures on Middle Eastern studies, the word "Oriental" is often found or studies that study the region of the Middle East. This region includes Saharan Africa, Egypt, the Indian border to Istanbul's Bosphorus Bay . In literature, the Middle Eastern usage was first used by the American geopolitical scientist Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1902 (Koppes, 1976). The mention of the Middle East is a foreign term given by the West. From an ideological point of view, the Middle East is a region that was formed on the basis of Western points of view and interests in the implementation of colonialism from the 19th century until today (Gerald & Alsdair, 1985).

The Middle East is home to dozens of ethnicities and religious ethnicities. Arabs are the majority ethnic group in the Middle East (Ethnic Groups in the Middle East, 2018). Apart from this, there are also Iranian, Turkmen, Urdu, Kurdish, Jewish, Azeri, Pasytun and Berber ethnic groups (Shoup, 2011). So the composition of the population in each country in the Middle East is very diverse. Egypt is the most populous country of Sunni Arabs in the Middle East and Bahrain is the least populated country in the region (Demography of Egypt, 2018).

The Middle East is also the cradle of the ancestors of various religions. This geography is favored by the Muslim population. However, the Middle East also has Christians and Judaism, Yedisims, Zerdus, Nusairi, Namiri and even Ensari (Religion in the Middle East, 20 18). The majority of the population in the Middle East is of Arab origin, the Arab tribes are also religiously divided into two groups, namely Sunni and Shia. Therefore, religious values are also one of the triggers of inter-tribal conflicts that have not been resolved for generations. This heterogeneous composition of the population is one of the factors of conflict between ethnic groups competing for political power. Differences in religious values are also a conflicting factor in power competition. While the value of Western democracy that is rooted in secularism, freedom is very difficult to achieve, let alone carry a liberal democracy that threatens autocratic power or family power. For example, the Esad family in Syria, which adheres to the minority Nusairi religion. At the head of a 90% majority Sunni population (Akdemir, 2000). This resulted in an autocratic government and triggered conflicts between ethnic groups and

religions. It is not surprising that most Syrians reject their own leaders because they consider the Nusairi family's oppression against the Sunni population for decades.

Another example of divisions caused by ethnic and religious differences in Iraq, where political parties symbolize religious values and represent certain ethnicities. The political parties in Iraq are only filled with Sunnis or Shiites. So much so that it gave birth to a political party composed solely of Turkmen, Arab or Kurdish tribes. We can therefore conclude that the very heterogeneous and varied composition of the population gives the opportunity to each religious or ethnic group in the Middle East to have a unique look and to have a different approach to Western ideology.

The Middle East, which is a legacy of colonialism, has a very unique political system. After the end of the mandated rule of England, France and Russia in the region in the 19th century, parts of the state in the region were inherited by families with close ties to the mandated state. This will make it easier for the mandated country to establish diplomatic relations in the future for various interests. However, the granting of power to certain families in the region led to the development of an autocratic state under the Arab Baath Socialist Party (Arab Baath Socialist Party). The government is held by only a small number of family members or affiliates of the Baath Party (Atay, 2000). The ethnic and family systems that exist in the Middle East mean that political power is controlled by certain families. So the political order in the Middle East tends to be monarchical and family controlled from generation to generation. Such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Sultanate of Yemen. Not only that, there are also republican and military political systems such as Egypt and Iraq. However, they still maintain the inherited power which only prioritizes the interests of certain groups and also maintains the obtained power. So that even if there is a democratic system, in practice there are only military and radical regimes controlled by certain families (Lenczowski, 1988).

With the desire and desire to rule, almost all ethnic groups in the Middle East find it difficult to accept democracy. The value of democracy itself is even rejected by the authorities in power and even this region rejects the presence of democracy (Ottaway and Carithers, 2004). Because the power is interpreted as belonging to a blue blood family. Therefore, the ideology of power that exists in the Middle East is completely opposed to the Western ideology. Thus, Western ideologies such as modernism, nationalism and even democracy are unlikely to flourish in the Middle East . Therefore, the democratization of the Middle East is only an agenda for Western countries that trigger conflicts over power struggles.

Out of a total of 17 countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Oman, Qatar, Cyprus, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Jordan) in the Middle East, not all countries are oil producers. There are also countries that have no natural oil or gas resources. Like Israel, which depends on the export technology it has developed. Another example is Jordan, which continues to try

to become a trading center in order to survive in the global economy. In general, the countries of the Middle East depend on one source of income, namely oil. Dependence on a single commodity like oil causes an unstable economy due to regulations created by the global commodity market. Therefore, when the main income decreases, it creates serious economic problems. As happened in Egypt which resulted in massive mass unemployment.

Understanding the need for a powerful military force to maintain the regime led governments in the Middle East to devote massive budgets to defense. Most state revenues are used for the purchase of weapons. Because the leaders of the Middle East are more concerned with the security and power of the regime than with the welfare of the people. Therefore, the investments made for other sectors are somewhat very important. Such as lack of food empowerment, lack of drinking water supply infrastructure and minimal investment in other major infrastructure. Thus making the Middle East a market for food exports. The government's misunderstanding of the importance of military might in maintaining balance in the Middle East has drained all state revenue for spending that ultimately poses a threat to the region. from the Middle-East. Like what was done by Saudi Arabia with arms spending of up to \$70 billion in 2017 (World Military Spending 2017). This worries the region, especially those with a Shiite population. Therefore, realism has closed the eyes of Middle Eastern leaders who are interested in what does not provide welfare to their people, and even benefits Western countries in terms of state spending. The author himself sees it as a Western ideological hoax committed against the Middle East for the benefit of the arms industry regardless of the real problem facing the Middle East. Where the Middle East is a market for the Western defense equipment industry. It is the atrocity of global capitalism which focuses only on profit by instilling a bad perception of the state towards the political leaders of the Middle East.

There is very little investment in the sectors that boost the economies of Middle Eastern countries. Such as lack of investment in food sector, pipeline, infrastructure, industry and even education. This raises a new issue that is very influential globally. The main problem is the uncontrolled urbanization caused by the increase in population. Coupled with inadequate infrastructure such as sewage, the city is neglected and dirty. Like what happened in Cairo, Karachi and even Baghdad which was once the center of civilization in its time. Lack of public investment in the infrastructure and industry sectors has led to high unemployment. This phenomenon makes it difficult for people in the Middle East to find employment. The number of unemployed causes the problem of poverty which triggers various other social problems. According to World Bank data, people in the Middle East have an average income of \$2 a day (The World Bank, 2017). So the economic turnover weakens due to lack of purchasing power as the population is dominated by middle to lower class. With various problems arising, this region is very

dynamic both politically and economically. Thus making the Middle East a conflict-prone area.

In Europe, nationalism is an element at the origin of the outbreak of the French Revolution. In the Middle East, nationalism is an imaginative ideology which in reality does not come from the Arabs. Arab nationalism was first launched by two thinkers. Namely Butrus al-Bustani, a Lebanese Christian Catholic figure and Nasif El-yazici of Greek Catholicism (Abu-Manneh, 1980). Al-Bustani is a pioneer in establishing the identity of the Syrian nation with a heterogeneous population with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds (Abu-Manneh, 1980). In the 19th century. Many Christian and Catholic missionary schools in the Middle East such as American College in Beirut, Robert College in Istanbul sparked the spread of Western ideology. This missionary school teaches various western ideologies such as; republic, nationalism, democracy. This encouraged political practice for Arab Christian tribes at this time. Basically, this nationalism seemed to oppose the Ottoman Turks who ruled this region during the 19th century. So Arab nationalism was raised to fight against the domination of the Ottoman Turks which was Islamic in style. Therefore, Arab nationalism is a Western ideology developed by non-Muslim figures to gain power from the collapse of the Ottoman Turks.

So far, there has been no strong Arab nationalism, as the Arab community itself experiences conflict, especially between Sunnis and Shiites. Therefore, Arab nationalism is not a setimen constructed for Arab nationalism but religious fanaticism which is an element that unites and divides the ethnic groups that exist in this region. It can be concluded that the ideology of nationalism in the Middle East is a product of Western thought which was introduced by European missionary schools. Arab society itself does not accept the nationalist model of the nation-state as a state identity. It is therefore difficult for the Arab community to unite, not to mention the different religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Many argue that the “Arab Spring/Awakening” is the beginning of the enlightenment of the Middle East region. Arab communities have taken to the streets in droves to fight for democracy, human rights and a decent life from their governments. In various media and even in books, many writings have argued that the Arab Spring is a dynamic generated by Arab societies aware of their rights as citizens. The turmoil of the Arab Spring has also been accelerated by the presence of social networks. If this is related to the arguments of the previous author, all of this is happening because of the failure of the political system and the economic system that the previous author discussed. Namely, social issues such as urbanization, population growth, unemployment and poverty have triggered protests from Tunisia to Yemen. The failure of Western ideological values in both the economic system and the governmental regime has resulted in various divisions that could pose a threat to world peace.

Western ideologies in the form of the nation state, nationalism and economic liberalization became the main ingredients for Middle Eastern leaders in building autocratic governments. Thus, the Arab Spring is an image of the failure of the regime and the economic system. For example, the conflict in Libya was an interesting progression during the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, also known as the "NATO revolution" in 2011. The conflict in Libya is essentially a conflict between tribes. Namely the clashes between tribes/tribes in Bengazi and Trablusgarp over the natural resources of Libya. However, this dispute invited the French exoloary State to participate in the application of the "democracy" desired by the "Libyan people". France's entry into the conflict in Libya also invited NATO to take part in the fight against Gaddafi, who was considered a dictator. Economically, France also has an interest in Libya. Where one of the largest oil fields in Libya is managed by a French company, namely Total (Total, 2018). So ultimately the Gaddafi government was overthrown by foreign intervention at the hands of the Libyan people themselves. This is one of the extremities of the "Arab Awakening" of which the Western media in general are proud. According to the author, what happened in Libya was a clash of Western and Eastern ideologies. Gaddafi, who defends socialist values and controls a major source of oil energy in the world, does not offer opportunities to pro-Westerns. The West is very unhappy when the source of the capitalist economy is in the hands of the dictatorial socialist regime. The West uses the values of democratic ideology to destroy Kadhafi using its own people. So what happened in Libya is not a natural thing but a global ideology to fight against Kadhafi. The media as the spearhead of the mission to overthrow the Libyan Gaddafi regime, with all their efforts to explain to the world community that the Libyan regime is undemocratic. So much so that NATO's intervention against Libya begins militarily with a quarrel over Western ideology, namely democracy, which failed to overthrow the Gaddafi government.

Did Libya improve after Gaddafi? Is it true that the Libyan people aspire to "democracy"? What do the West and its coalition want? These are all questions that need to be digested again. Where Libya after the Gaddafi regime split between Benggazi and Trablusgarp due to competition for power between the two tribes. Libya's ethnic divisions are not fighting for democratic values, but for natural oil resources. Western countries such as Britain, France and the United States are unlikely to intervene in Libya if they do not have both ideological and economic interests. The source of oil energy in Libya is exploited and the product is purchased by British and French companies since the Gaddafi regime. These companies such as Shell Group, British Perol and Total. Western intervention against Libya may result in safeguarding Western assets in Libya. It is a factor of the liberal economic system which is so cruel as to have to divide Libya for the benefit of the world capitalist system. To legitimize what happened in Libya, the Western media presented as if the welfare of the Libyan people would exist if democracy

could be implemented in Libya. However, it is a hegemonic state ideology that has good ideological hegemony in international politics. Thus, this ideology destroys the concept of the state in Middle Eastern society. Divisions and conflicts cannot be avoided under the pretext of "democracy" and the future of the Libyan people.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Various events in the Middle East such as Syria, Libya, Iraq, Egypt and even Afghanistan are far removed from the struggle for democracy for the welfare of its people. Ideological understanding sparked Middle Eastern dissent in politics. Thus encouraging in conflicts and civil wars. Differences in religion, political regimes and also ethnicity are the main causes of conflict between societies in the Middle East. Western ideology such as democracy is an ideology very contrary to the values and culture of the Middle Eastern regime. Where people in the Middle East tend to be more comfortable with autocratic regimes or even dictators in western expressions. Ideologies such as democracy, liberalism and human rights are not the solution to resolving conflicts in the Middle East, which are incompatible and contrary to cultural values and political culture. However, democracy is a political regime that is often applied in various countries. However, democratic regimes are difficult to implement in Middle Eastern countries. The Middle East is a very dynamic region with a heterogeneous population composition of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures. The author concludes that democracy in the Middle East is only an ideology used by certain pro-Western groups to publicly legitimize the accession to power. This has been proven by what happened in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq and even Afghanistan. So that democratic rule is not a solution to the conflicts that have emerged in the Middle East so far. In this case, the authors recommend that it is preferable that the system of foreign parties does not intervene in the existing political regimes in the Middle East. Because the peoples of the Middle East have their own political culture which is far from speaking of democracy, the ultimate goal is the well-being of the people. Therefore, letting the Middle East develop independently without foreign intervention, both ideological and military, is the best solution. This has been proven by the success of existing political regimes in Gulf countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates which are far from democratic. Even the Middle East has been the center of ancient magnificent civilizations such as ancient Babylon to the Persian Empire and has endured through the centuries.

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Olusegun Adesola Busari