A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE U.S.A IN THE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE-EAST WITH AN EMphasis ON THE UNREST IN BAHRAIN AND SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

With the revolution in Tunisia, a wave of unrest dominated the whole Arabian countries. Dictator governments became subject to the wrath of their people. Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen overthrew their dictator governments; among these, the unrest is still going on in Bahrain and Syria; although each of these has its own characteristics, the international community, the top of which is the U.S.A, have adopted two different approaches, so that it has also entailed the protests by the supporters of human rights. The aim of the present research is to compare the performance of the U.S.A towards the developments in the two countries of Bahrain and Syria. It seems that these twofold standards, which are created in accordance with the benefits of the dominating governments, are somehow due to their arrogant spirit, showing how they have turned the international community and international organizations into a means of meeting their own benefits.

KEYWORDS: Arabian Spring, Bahrain, Syria, Human Rights

In today's international community, one of the obvious principles in international law is the non-discrimination principle. In different texts and documents issued by international organizations and agreements, this point has been greatly emphasized. The obvious example in this regard is the introduction to the Charter of the United Nations. In the introduction to this charter, all countries including the large and the small are considered as having equal rights, and no discrimination is approved. The international community demands the same. International partnership is also realized if equal rights are considered for countries. In the past half century, unfortunately, despite the emphasis of the Charter of the United Nations and multiple reminders in other international documents, we have seen paradoxical and twofold behaviors with countries in the international level. One of the cases which made the international community involved again, where everyone was seeking the reactions of the international community and the U.S.A to it, was the series of popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle-East, which was named the Arabian Spring. Following these revolutions, the dominant governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen collapsed; however, two of the most important uprisings are still hazy. Despite the passage of over 2 years since the start of the great wave of protests in the Arabian world, Syria and Bahrain uprisings have not still come to any specific end. These two uprisings, as well as their similarities and differences could be interesting.

The necessity of considering the reaction of the U.S.A is because this government is among the basic and dominant performers in the international decision making level. Following this point, first the Arabian Spring and the features of each of these two uprisings are studied, and the reaction of the U.S.A towards each of the two uprisings is then analyzed.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data collection method in this research, considering the nature of the subject, is referring to the existing text, collecting research cards, and analyzing them. Based on the chosen library method, the used data resources are library and internet resources. Especially with the severe shortage of print resources in this context, the most important used resources here are the Internet resources. The descriptive-analysis method is also used in this research; that is, there is an attempt to first describe and outline the under discussion issues, and then analyze and explain them.

ARABIAN SPRING (ISLAMIC AWARENESS)

After the Second World War and with the winner countries leaving the colonized lands, as well as the evolutions in the basic needs of man, one of the major discourses of which was the right to determine the destiny, many countries gained independence [1]. Myriad Arabic and African countries could serve as the examples. The Arabic countries in the Middle-East and the North Africa which seeking after their independence, were ruled by caliphs and stooge military, and managed by the profuse wealth of oil, gas, and tourism; instead of attending to popular requests and consolidating the bases of democracy, they turned
to gathering wealth and power, not paying attention to the rightful requests of the people. Here, the poverty domain grew more and more in North African countries. The spark of popular uprising was finally struck in the city of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia. Muhammad Bu-Azizzi, a 26 year-old youth who had spent his whole life peddling in a small narrow dusty street, burned himself in fire in front of the city hall building as a protest to the officer who had retained his stuff and humiliated him [2]. This is how one of the rarest happenings of the twenty first century took form. The chain revolutions dominated North Africa and the Middle-East. The news of the police encounter with Muhammad al-bu-Azizzi and his reaction drew hundreds of the youth living in Sidi Bouzid area to the streets. The security forces encountered the protests, leading to clashes between the police forces and the protesters, and the arrestment of some of them. The actions afterwards also prepared the conditions in such a way that Tunisian people joined the street protests in groups and finally took Zeyn-ul-Abedin-ibne-Ali off his seat of power [3]. Following this popular uprising in Tunisia, a great wave took form in Islamic countries. After Tunisia, the unrest dominated Egypt. People in Egypt, which had been in custody of the military forces since the sovereignty, after many years of tolerance under the yoke of the military forces and fed up with the present state, finally began a revolution. The Egyptians also overthrew Mubarak's government after a while, making the dissolution of the second dictatorial system in the region [4]. The importance of Egypt is because the country is known as the spiritual leader of the Arab world. From then on, the wave of liberation and awareness got an increase among Arab nations. Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria stood at the top of these protests. Among these, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Algeria got involved with lower level popular uprisings. The opponents of the dominant system in Arabic countries reached some kind of unity in goal with their slogan "People want the deposition of the regime", which was the collapse of the rulers of their countries [5]. With the increase of the protests, several names were given to this great uprising; from the titles of Islamic and Arabic Awareness to Arabian Spring were the best known of these titles. Among these titles, Arabian Spring took more attention and use than the others.

SYRIA CRISIS

Syria is located in the Asia Minor with an area of 185180 km. the country has an estimated population of 23 million. 90 percent of the country's population are Muslims (74 percent are Sunni and 16 percent Alavi and Druzi Shia) and 10 percent are Christians. The dominant government of the country has an age of over 40 years. Colonizing countries like France, gave too much value to the minorities in order to prevent a national unison among the Arabs, which in itself became a reason for the increase in Alavian's power and their gain over the government after Syria gained independence. [6]. With the coup d'état by Alavi officers in the mid 70s, the government fell under the control of Alavians. With the empowerment of Hafiz Asad in 1970, the Alavian ethnic-religious minority overcame the Sunni-religion majority of Syria [7]. With the death of Hafiz Asad, his son Bashar Asad took his place. In 2011 and in eleventh year of his reign, a series of unrest and protests took place in Syria. In fact, Syria like many of Arabic countries has many economic and political problems. Apart from the few Arabic countries which own a wealth due to their natural resources, the rest of the Arabic countries deal with economic problems. In fact, the type of the problems of the people in Syria is very similar to those of the people of the other Arabic countries in the region. Syria was unsuccessful in performing their domestic policies, taking no consideration of the people's rights and the requests of the majority of them; as a result, following the popular uprisings in North Africa and the collapse of the wall of fear between the rulers and the people, people of Syria also rose seeking after their rights and the improvement of the economic condition [8]. At the beginning, the majority of the protesters were common people asking or the improvement of their condition; however, following the uprising, some changes were seen in this movement. The result was the entrance of various and different forces into the battle field and their clash with Syria. The most important forces clashing with Syria after the intensification of the clashes are the following:

- The Kurd: right now, the Kurd have left the group of the opponents due to their reaching an agreement with Syria, and are waiting for the result of the developments while withdrawing and observing them.
- Ikhwán-ul-Musulmin: this group includes a major part of Syria population. In fact Syria social foundations are not, unlike Egypt, dependant on them.
- Foreign Opponents of Syria: this group is active in Turkey and Burhan Ghalioun is a major figure in this council.
- The committee of national coordination: this group has a position in Syria and is active inside and
outside Syria's territory, having Hassan Abd-ul-Azim as the head.

- The Salafi: this group uses violence and has no position inside Syria. It should be noted here that as a regional performer seeking after the continuation and intensification of the crisis, Saudi Arabia has given and gives many financial aids to the Salafi in Syria. In general, Saudi Arabia has supported and nourished the Salafi in Syria since 1982. We can name "Jibhat-al-Nusra" among these groups. This organization has declared the creation of divine government as its goal.

- Free Syria Army: this group of opponents also is supported by the Arab League and the west, having performed armed uprisings in some cities especially in the city of Homs. This group is one of the most important groups clashing with Syria [9].

With the entrance of these groups and the spread of the clashes, the scene of Syria popular revolution was more like a civil war than a movement in line with the other revolutions taken place in the region. About 100 thousand people were killed and over 5 million were strayed over the 2 years of armed clash [10]. The entrance of the Salafi and the radical groups affiliated to Al-Qaida, on the other hand, has led to some kind of lack of international consensus in making a unified decision for the domestic clashes in Syria. In this regard, the clashes are still going on and no serious solution is offered for its termination.

The Reaction of the U.S.A to the Syria Issue

The actions done by the U.S.A to the Syria crisis could be discussed and analyzed in two frameworks. First, the reaction of this government to Syria is considered in itself and the reaction of this government in the guise of collective actions and in the form of the UN or other international assemblies is explained. The reaction of regional organizations like the Arab League could be studied in the U.S.A movement framework.

The unilateral actions by the U.S.A over the past 2 years have had a relatively intermediate feature. While condemning Asad's government, the U.S.A never expressed his full support of the opponents. Also, the U.S.A has got confused about sending arms to the opponents of Bashar Asad. The reason for this approach by the U.S.A is the extensive and growing presence of Salafi and Al-Qaida affiliated currents among the opposing groups. Apart from these cautious behaviors by the U.S.A, some actions are developed over the recent months which show the determination of the U.S.A in overthrowing Bahar Asad. Educating the militia forces in Jordan and the 10 million dollar help for the civilian purposes of the opponents could be referred to as the examples of such actions. Also, in a meeting under the name of "Friends of Syria" a 123 million dollar help was promised to the opponents [11]; however, in the most recent movement by the U.S.A, the country has launched exporting arms to Syria. This stage could itself be a prelude for military actions by other countries about Syria crisis [12].

The actions by the U.S.A about Syria can also be discussed and studied from other aspects. The positioning of Ms. Susan Rice, the U.S.A representative in the Security Council shows this approach of the U.S.A very well. According to her, the U.S.A strategy about the Syria crisis is that we enter the Security Council, the Europe Union, NATO, the Arab League, and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council into the scene with all power to make Bashar Asad abdicate the power [13]. Here, the Europe Union's failure to renew the sanctions on sending arms to Syria is one of the most evident examples of the indirect involvement of the U.S.A through its western allies [14]. With their suspension of the Syria membership and consigning the country's seat to the opponents, the Arab League also, on the other hand, proceeded in practice in line with the U.S.A policies [15]. The approval of two resolutions in the General Assembly in line with the lobbies by the U.S.A and the regional mass media could also be explained. Considering only Syria responsible and blameful despite the oppositions by different countries and overlooking the crimes by the groups opposing Syria, all suggest a one-sided judgment [16].

Considering the evidence cited, there is a growing pressure on Syria, a pressure which is to some extent unnatural and outside the scope of the conventional. This one-sided approach, undoubtedly, produces reasons based on which the U.S.A and other organizations and countries under the influence of this country have adopted their approach. The most important of the reasons are the following:

- Ensuring the flow of regional energy to the west
- Advancing the so-called process of "Middle-East Peace"
- Supplying and ensuring the interests of Israel
- Struggling with political Islam in the name of fighting with terrorism and fundamentalism.
- Confronting or at least controlling the countries which are against the interests of the U.S.A
- Spreading the American culture in the guise of creating emocracy, free market, and secularism in the region [17].

It is known, with a surface look at the above points, that Syria and Bashar Asad's system are among the most important impediments for the U.S.A in achieving the above purposes.

**THE BAHRAIN ISSUE**

Bahrain is a collection of islands with an area of 695 km and a population of less than 1 million people. The country is located in the southern part of Persian Gulf, near Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Prior to independence, the people of the island of Bahrain have mostly been Shiites with Iranian origins and Persian language, but after the independence and the attempts to change this country's identity, many Arabs entered this country. In general, over 60 percent of the country's population are Shiites and less than 40 percent are Sunnis [18]. After the demise of Karim-Khan-Zand and due to Ghajar leaders' incompetence, Bahrain was dominated by Arabs. Al-Khalifah family dominated Bahrain later on. This family continuously tried to develop their influence and power in Bahrain. To this aim, Al-Khalifa signed some agreements with the U.K, and gradually increased their influence in this land.

Although Iran considered Bahrain part of its territory, Iran's policies towards Bahrain changed later on; influenced by the preparations, Iran agreed to forbear from Iran's historical sovereignty over Bahrain. This happened after voting in the national parliament and assigning the fate of Bahrain to a referendum. This referendum which took place in Bahrain led to Bahrain's independence. Finally, Bahrain formally gained independence in 1971 and Iran was the first country which recognized it [19].

With regard to the political history of this country, political conditions and structures and the special relations between Bahrain government and its people, has led to popular developments and protests in the country [20]. In the 80s and the 90s, long and violent clashes and the struggles took place between security forces and the political activists. The major reason for this was the discrimination between the dominant Sunni class and the common Shiites [21]. People of Bahrain who had a 2 decade history of political action and struggle against the government got a new life with the advent of the Arabian Spring and developed their struggles. On February 14, the revolution's spark was hit. People gathered in Lo'lo' Square. With the increase of the cowds, the security forces of Bahrain retreated; on February 22 the crowd present in Lo'lo' Square rose to its highest. Between February 14 and March 13 of 2011, the streets of Bahrain were filled with crowds of 200 to 300 thousand protesting people. Such a crowd was very remarkable in the scale of Bahrain's population, and shows a high turnout in the protests [22]. Although the protests were peaceful, Bahrain embarked on very aggressive practices. During the attack by the government forces and its allied forces against the protesters, 97 people were killed and thousands were wounded, detained, and exiled [23]. We can name the following issues as the most important reasons for Bahrain revolution:

- The existence of an authoritarian and non-democratic government
- The dependence of Bahraini government on the regional and trans-regional governments and disregarding public demands
- The existence of religious, racial, and ethnic discriminations [24]

**The Reaction of the U.S.A to the Bahrain Issue**

The U.S.A has adopted the silence policy about Bahrain protests, which unlike the Syria uprising, is completely peaceful. While in the interests of the U.S.A allies are the first and those of the U.S.A are the second priorities in Syria, the interests of the U.S.A are the top priority in Bahrain more than any other time and place. The huge oil and gas resources in the Persian Gulf, which is known as the global energy hub on the one hand, and the main base and headquarters of American forces located in the Persian Gulf in Bahrain on the other hand, has made the archipelago especially important for the U.S.A [25]. Maryam Al-Khaja, the head of Bahrain Center for Human Rights, comments on the U.S.A policy: "the U.S.A has done nothing. I do not think The U.S.A or the U.K will immediately change their international policies due to the geopolitical interests they have in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the other countries of the region" [26]. The U.S.A silence is also sometimes accompanied by respectful and democratic warnings. In its most recent positioning about disclaiming the citizenship of some of the opponents of Bahraini regime, the U.S.A has sufficed to express concern as the only reaction [27].
Even the spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights regarded this action contrary to the fundamental principles of human rights. He emphasized that citizenship is a fundamental right which is supported in article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights saying that no one shall be deprived of his citizenship. He also reminded to Bahraini authorities that he recognizes the country's responsibility in maintaining law and order; however, any action must be defined in the framework of international human rights standards [28].

The most important concern among the reactions to the Bahraini crisis was about the issue of the military forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates entering the country. With the growth of pressures by the opponents, Bahrain demanded help from his allies in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council to escape from the pressures. Following this request, Saudi Arabia sent 1000 military forces and 500 military forces from the UAE into Bahrain under the supervision of the council. Continuing its process of dealing with the Bahrain issue, the U.S.A showed no specific reaction to this issue [29]. The intertwined relationships between Saudi Arabia and the U.S.A are among the most important reasons of the U.S.A overlooking Bahraini people's right of self-determination and this country's silence towards other countries' military forces coming into Bahrain. On the other hand, the argument that the issue of importing these forces is in accordance with the joint mission and statute among the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council lacks legal legitimacy; because, the mission of these forces is protecting the member countries against external attacks, while no external attack has taken place in Bahrain [30].

One of the other aspects of the U.S.A policy towards Bahrain protests, which is in line with the country's general policies, is diverting the focus of the media from Bahrain to Syria. The amount of the news about Bahrain broadcast by the media is insignificant compared with that of Syria. This has caused the public opinion to pay less attention to other popular uprisings in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, etc. [31].

CONCLUSION

Comparing the popular uprisings in Bahrain and Syria, we come to many fundamental conclusions. Both of these uprisings were formed following the popular uprisings in North Africa. Both uprisings had precedents; the majorities were dominated by the minorities in both countries. To achieve civilian and military positions is very difficult for the majority in both countries; both countries are considered as the most important strategic regions of the world; however, there are major differences between the two movements: Syria stands across from the west led by the U.S.A and is the strategic highway of the resistance circle, while Bahrain is the camp and headquarters of American military in the region. Bahrain protests have always been going on slowly yet steadily; the Syria protests, however, have been very discontinuous. Bahrain protests have been an attack against the U.S.A interests in the southern coast of Persian Gulf, while the Syria protests were in practice against the only hostile government, Israel, which is located in its neighborhood. While the similarities between the two uprisings must lead to universal and especially the U.S.A support of the popular uprisings in the two countries, a twofold and completely distinct behavior was taken by the U.S.A and its allies. The U.S.A total silence about the Bahrain issue and its biased position in favor of Syrian opponents and the pretext of human rights in this regard, implied the dominance and priority of the U.S.A interests over human and international rights. While the opponents' presence has not been pervasive in Syria, proceeding towards religious struggles, and distancing from democratic demands, the west still supports the protesters and has doubled up the pressure on Bashar Asad to abdicate the government. In Bahrain, however, despite people's democratic demands and the nonviolence, the U.S.A has adopted a significant silence, inviting the two sides to negotiate. The twofold standards of the U.S.A in dealing with the two uprisings were made public when the U.S.A showed no reaction to the military forces entering Bahrain from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The U.S.A political and economic interests in the Persian Gulf region in practice overlooked the fundamental rights of Bahraini people, trying to divert the attention of global community. In general, the right to demand and utilization of fundamental human rights is any nation's right in the world, no matter Syrian or Bahraini; however, the twofold behaviors by the human rights claimants who try to induce their interests in the name of human rights, besides promoting distrust in human rights concepts, directs the human society towards understanding the reality that the U.S.A is ready to slaughter the most fundamental human rights concepts and trifle with international institutions and organizations.
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