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The Conflict of Iran and the USA Post Arab Spring in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the conflict of Iran and the USA Post Arab Spring in the Middle East. Prior to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the relationship between the two countries was amicable but deteriorated afterward. The involvement of the United States and Iran in proxy wars in Syria and Yemen reflects the tension in their relationship. The concept of Proxy War illustrates how conflict actors use third parties as arenas for power competition. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach, uncovering relevant data and facts for analysis. The research concludes that the conflict is triggered by the United States' interests in the Middle East disrupted by Iran, leading to conflicts in military doctrine, geographical, socio-political order, and diplomatic fields. The United States adopts an offensive stance, while Iran adopts a defensive one.

Keywords: United States-Iran, Offense-Defense, Arab Spring, Proxy War

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas tentang konflik Iran dan Amerika Serikat pasca Arab Spring di Timur Tengah. Sebelum Revolusi Islam Iran pada tahun 1979, hubungan kedua negara berjalan harmonis, namun situasi memburuk pasca-revolusi dan ketegangan tersebut bertahan hingga saat ini. Keterlibatan Amerika Serikat dan Iran dalam konflik proksi di Suriah dan Yaman mencerminkan eskalasi ketegangan di antara mereka. Konsep Perang Proksi menyoroti bagaimana pihak-pihak konflik menggunakan entitas ketiga sebagai medan pertempuran untuk persaingan kekuatan mereka. Penelitian ini mengadopsi metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif analitis untuk mengungkap data dan fakta yang relevan yang kemudian dianalisis secara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konflik antara kedua negara dipicu oleh ketidaksetujuan atas

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kepentingan Amerika Serikat di Timur Tengah yang terganggu oleh kehadiran dan pengaruh Iran. Konflik ini mencakup aspek-aspek doktrin militer, geografis, tatanan sosial politik, dan diplomasi. Amerika Serikat cenderung bersikap ofensif dalam menanggapi kehadiran Iran, sementara Iran memilih sikap defensif dalam menghadapi tekanan dari Amerika Serikat.

Keywords: Amerika Serikat-Iran, Ofensif-Defensif, Musim Semi Arab, Perang Proksi

INTRODUCTION

The conflict between the United States and Iran has always been a topic of global discussion. The 1979 Iranian Revolution transformed the initially harmonious relationship between the United States and Iran into a tense one. In this heated situation, Muslim politics significantly influenced perceptions of Islam and relations between the Muslim world and the West at the end of the 20th century. This condition made the United States continually haunted by Muslim politics. The fall of the Shah Reza Pahlevi regime engendered distrust and surprise in the United States regarding post-Revolutionary Iran changes. The White House was concerned about the emergence of radical Islamic fundamentalism or Khomeinism that could spread to other countries after this revolution (Esposito, 2010).

The United States and Iran once walked hand in hand in politics, policies, and trade economics. However, after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, this intimacy collapsed with the regime change from Shah Pahlevi to Ayatollah Khomeini. This triggered various conflicts between the US and Iran. The differing views of the two countries on ideology, politics, economics, social, and cultural matters at the local, regional, and international levels made bilateral conflict inevitable. In the international order, conflicts often arise between two or more countries that have discrepancies in politics, economics, and policies. Moreover, ideological differences also trigger conflicts that evolve from inter-state conflicts into conflicts between alliances.

Post-Arab Spring, tensions between the United States and Iran remained high. These two countries are involved in proxy wars in Syria and Yemen, causing conditions in both countries to be very concerning. Destabilization due to proxy wars has resulted in many casualties, both on the side of the US, Iran, and other civilian populations. This conflict also creates security dilemmas for affected communities. The proxy wars reflect the efforts of both countries to solidify their dominance in the Middle East region.

Likewise, with the countries involved in the turmoil of the Middle East conflict. Efforts to secure the interests of a country are based on cooperation between countries to strengthen their defense and security. The actions that lead to conflict certainly have materialistic motives. The dynamism of conflict in religious, economic, social, and political aspects also colors the national interests of the US and Iran in the Middle East. As evidenced by proxy wars in Syria and Yemen, which bring together Western and Eastern alliances on the battlefield.

All conflicts that occur in proxy wars tend to be related to power. To achieve power, politics is used as one of the approaches. Therefore, political efforts made by many major countries are closely related to the strength of the country, both in foreign and international politics. With this power, a country can implement foreign policy as an

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implementation of foreign politics. In the Cold War era, major countries were very concerned about national security issues. Security interests also affect the political interests of a country, so proxy actions become a rational choice to ensure security (Rusdiana, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers extensively discuss the tensions between the United States and Iran, as evidenced by articles like Albert B. Wolf's piece in the Comparative Strategy journal titled "After JCPOA: American Grand Strategy toward Iran." In his article, Wolf identified four fundamental interests of the United States in the Middle East directly linked to Iran's behavior: energy security, nuclear program proliferation, terrorism, and Israeli security guarantee (Wolf, 2018, p. 22). Similarly, Enayatollah Yazdani, in the Sociology Study journal, addressed the confrontation between America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yazdani highlighted three fundamental issues underlying tensions between the United States and Iran over recent decades: the nuclear program, development of ballistic missiles, and Iran's regional influence (Yazdani, 2019, p. 180). Yazdani regarded these issues as serious threats to US interests in the region, leading to escalating tensions over time. Nevertheless, Yazdani also concluded that the United States' strategy of confrontation with Iran resulted in a state of "No War and No Peace."

Next written by Quaid. Quaid, in the article titled "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects," asserts that the relationship between the United States and Iran has been inherently conflictual since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This animosity stems from events such as the US-hostage crisis, the freezing of Iranian assets, and differing perspectives on the security framework of the Middle East. Despite numerous attempts by both parties to normalize bilateral relations, various obstacles hinder progress. While there are areas of mutual interest, issues such as regional peace initiatives, terrorism, and the Iranian nuclear dispute continue to cast a shadow over the relationship. Additionally, domestic political dynamics and the involvement of US regional allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia pose significant challenges to achieving harmonious relations. However, there are positive indications for improved relations, including Iran's geopolitical position in a changing regional security landscape, the diminishing threat of the Islamic State, and the existence of a framework for a comprehensive nuclear agreement between Iran and the United States.

METHOD
This research utilizes a qualitative method, specifically a descriptive approach. Qualitative research can be defined as a study that produces descriptive data about spoken or written words. The qualitative research approach is a process of inquiry and understanding based on methods that investigate social phenomena and human issues. In this study, the researcher creates a complex depiction, examining words, detailed reports of respondents' views, and conducting studies in natural settings. The data sources in this research are secondary data sources, namely books and journals discussing the Dominance of Iran and the USA post-Arab Spring in the Middle East. This data is derived from sources that can provide relevant explanations, such as Google Scholar, journals, articles, and also information from the internet. The importance of using data lies in the fact that data is the analysis of a writer that can produce the data to be obtained.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The date of December 17, 2010, marked the beginning of protests and regime downfall in the Middle East, known as the Arab Spring. At that time, Bouazizi died from severe burns as a strong protest against the government's arrogant attitude. This triggered massive protests in various regions of Tunisia. The protests successfully ousted the regime of Zine El Abidine, commonly known as Ben Ali, in just 10 days. This event became the starting point for the birth of the Arab Spring (Badawi, 2019).

The wave of revolution in Tunisia is the culmination of various factors, including the repressive actions of the Zainal Ben Ali government and the long-standing anger of the Tunisian people. The emergence of the Arab Spring provided a very opportune moment for the Tunisian people to overthrow the regime of Zainal Ben Ali. Tunisia's success in overthrowing the authoritarian regime made the Syrian people increasingly optimistic that they could also do the same in their country (Brownlee, 2015).

From December 2010 to mid-2013, six countries in the Middle East experienced the phenomenon of the Arab Spring, including Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. This phenomenon showed a fundamental similarity in the process and highly varied outcomes. The common trend in this process is the presence of "uprisings" as the main symptom. These uprisings have three distinct characteristics: the outbreak of non-violent mass protests for several days, the spread of protests to various geographic locations, and the occupation of public spaces by demonstrators, such as Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, Tahrir Square in Cairo, and Pearl Roundabout (Dawwar al-Lu'lu'ah) in Manama, Bahrain.

Ahmad Sahide, in his writing, revealed the triggering factors of the Arab Spring in the Middle East (Sahide, 2019), which can be seen from four aspects, including:
1. Many countries in the Middle East are led by authoritarian leaders who have been in power for a long time and gained power through undemocratic means.
2. Long-standing leaders tend to have numerous human rights violations and restrict expression spaces for their people, including press freedom.
3. Economic crises and poverty affect the people led by these authoritarian regimes, leading to increased unemployment.

The instability in several Middle Eastern countries has had a significant impact on the domestic political and economic constellations. Economically, the increasing rates of poverty and unemployment pose serious challenges. This situation is exacerbated by the authoritarian stance of the government, making Middle Eastern societies feel unjustly treated.

The common symptoms of the Arab Spring phenomenon are dominated by protest actions from individuals or groups that later spread widely to various regions. These actions are taken due to shared mission and collective goals. The mass waves target vital objects of the state such as strategic public spaces to pressure the government. Moreover, the selection of strategic objects facilitates mass gatherings, allowing them to voice their aspirations together. These demonstrations are not without reason; the four factors above provide a clear picture of the political, social, and economic conditions that have a significant impact on security stability in Syria.

The relationship between the United States and Iran

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The relationship between the United States and Iran has been marked by complexity, tension, and fluctuation over the past several decades. Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the two countries maintained relatively amicable relations, with the United States providing support to the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. However, following the revolution and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, relations between the two nations deteriorated significantly.

Key points of contention between the United States and Iran include Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology, its support for militant groups in the Middle East, and its opposition to American influence in the region. The United States, in turn, has imposed economic sanctions on Iran and has at times taken military action against Iranian interests, such as the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani in 2020.

Despite these tensions, there have been sporadic attempts at diplomacy and engagement between the two countries. For example, the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, though the agreement was later abandoned by the United States in 2018.

Overall, the relationship between the United States and Iran remains complex and fraught with challenges, with both countries pursuing their own strategic interests in the region while often finding themselves at odds with one another. Diplomatic efforts to address these tensions continue, but achieving a lasting resolution remains elusive.

The relationship between the United States and Iran has undergone significant ups and downs throughout history. In the period before the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, the two countries enjoyed relatively harmonious relations, cooperating in the fields of politics, economy, and military. However, the revolution dramatically altered Iran's political landscape, overthrowing the pro-Western Shah Pahlavi and replacing him with a theocratic government led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Since then, the relationship between the United States and Iran has deteriorated dramatically.

The tension between the United States and Iran has escalated significantly since the revolution, especially after the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981, where 52 American diplomats and citizens were held hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran for 444 days. This event worsened diplomatic relations and created deep-seated mistrust between the two countries (Shafar, 2020).

In the decades that followed, the United States and Iran have often been involved in direct and proxy conflicts. One of the most notable examples is their involvement in proxy wars in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen. The United States supports certain opposition groups in Syria fighting against the Bashar al-Assad regime, backed by Iran. Similarly, in Yemen, the United States supports a coalition led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels supported by Iran.

Ideological, political, and strategic differences between the two countries continue to fuel tensions. The United States often criticizes Iran for its nuclear program, which is seen as a threat to regional and global security. In response, Iran accuses the United States of interfering in its domestic affairs and causing instability in the region.

Despite diplomatic efforts to ease tensions, such as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), which was later withdrawn by the United States in 2018 under the Trump administration, tensions have escalated again, with Iran resuming some nuclear activities previously halted under the agreement.

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Overall, the relationship between the United States and Iran is influenced by a long history of distrust, conflicting interests, and deep ideological differences. This relationship continues to fluctuate and plays a significant role in the political and security dynamics of the Middle East.

Post-Arab Spring, the political dynamics in the Middle East have undergone significant changes that have also affected the relationship between the United States and Iran. Although both countries have different roles in facing the wave of protests and political changes in several Arab countries, their conflicting interests continue to exacerbate bilateral relations. The Arab Spring, which began in late 2010, triggered a series of protests and revolutions in several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Each country experienced unique political changes, but the cumulative effect of these movements brought regional instability involving global actors like the United States and Iran.

One of the main triggers of tension between the United States and Iran is Iran's nuclear program. Although Iran claims its nuclear program is peaceful and aimed at meeting domestic energy needs, the United States and its allies, especially Israel and European countries, doubt these claims and believe Iran is developing military nuclear capabilities. These concerns are exacerbated by Iran's history of covert nuclear programs and lack of transparency in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This has led to harsh economic sanctions by the United States and other countries against Iran, significantly impacting Iran's economy. These sanctions target not only Iran's energy sector but also its banking, shipping, and other industries, leading to Iran's economic isolation on the international stage. The influence of these sanctions is evident in Iran's economic downturn, rising inflation, and difficulties for the population in obtaining basic necessities.

Furthermore, Iran's military intervention in Syria has also been a trigger of tension. Iran has provided substantial military support to the Bashar al-Assad regime in the Syrian civil war, including through the deployment of troops, military equipment, and logistical support. Iran's involvement aims to maintain al-Assad as a strategic ally and secure supply routes to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the United States and its allies, such as Gulf states and some NATO members, have supported rebels seeking to overthrow al-Assad. This support comes in the form of military aid, training, and intelligence. Iran's involvement in the Syrian conflict not only strengthens its position in the region but also raises concerns for the United States and its allies regarding Iran's expansion of power in the region. The Syrian conflict has become a proxy battleground between these two powers, with wide-ranging implications for regional stability and power balance in the Middle East. The prolonged war has caused severe humanitarian crises and added burdens to neighboring countries receiving millions of refugees.

Moreover, Iran is also accused of supporting militant groups in the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, seen as Iran's foreign policy tool to expand its influence and counter the interests of the United States and its allies, especially Israel. With financial and military assistance from Iran, Hezbollah has become a significant political and military force in Lebanon and has been involved in various regional conflicts, including battles with Israel. Iran's support for militant groups also extends to Yemen, where Iran is accused of supporting the Houthi rebels in the protracted civil war. This support has exacerbated the already complex conflict, with Saudi Arabia and its allies

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supporting the internationally recognized government of Yemen. The war in Yemen has caused severe humanitarian crises, with millions facing famine and shortages of medicines.

In the face of international pressure and economic sanctions, Iran seeks to strengthen its relations with countries willing to oppose U.S. dominance in the Middle East, such as Russia and China. These relationships provide Iran with some diplomatic and economic maneuvering room, although the pressure from sanctions remains significant. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), briefly provided hope for tension reduction, but the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement in 2018 under the Trump administration has increased tension again and caused Iran to resume some of its previously restricted nuclear activities (Takeyh, 2013).

Overall, post-Arab Spring dynamics have shown that the relationship between the United States and Iran is influenced by various complex factors, ranging from Iran's nuclear program to military intervention in Syria and support for militant groups. These tensions not only affect bilateral relations between the two countries but also regional stability and security in the Middle East. The United States and Iran continue to compete for influence in the region, with lasting impacts on global politics and power balances in the Middle East. Despite diplomatic efforts to reduce tension, such as negotiations on the nuclear program and regional initiatives to stabilize Syria and Yemen, significant challenges remain, and the future of U.S.-Iran relations remains highly uncertain.

CONCLUSION

Post-Arab Spring, the Middle East has undergone significant changes in political and regional security dynamics, where the dominance of Iran and the United States plays a major role. Iran has capitalized on the chaos caused by the Arab Spring to expand its influence through support for allied regimes and militant groups in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. This strategy has successfully strengthened Iran's position as a significant regional power, albeit often increasing tensions with other countries, especially the United States and its allies.

Meanwhile, the United States seeks to maintain and expand its influence in the Middle East by implementing economic sanctions against Iran, targeting its nuclear program, and supporting rebel groups as well as allied governments. These measures reflect the United States' efforts to curb Iran's influence and safeguard its strategic interests in the region.

The conflict of interests between Iran and the United States has deepened regional tensions, complicated peace efforts, and altered power dynamics in the Middle East. Both countries employ various means, including military, diplomatic, and economic, to strengthen their dominance. However, these dominance efforts often exacerbate humanitarian crises and prolong existing conflicts, indicating that stability in the Middle East is still far from being achieved. The dominance of Iran and the United States in this region creates a complex and often perilous geopolitical environment, with significant impacts on power balances and global stability.

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