

SYRIAN DISPUTE IN THE CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Arap Baharına yapısal inşacı bakış açısı getirmektir. Bu bağlamda Suriye'deki ayaklanmaya karşı uluslararası geliştirilen inisiyatif vaka çalışması olarak seçilmiştir. Yapısal inşacılığa göre kimlikler devletlerin çıkarlarını şekillendirmekte ve uluslararası kuruluşlar buna göre tasarlanmaktadır. Alexander Wendt'e göre bu durumun sonucu olarak uluslararası sistemdeki anarşik yapı çatışma veya işbirliği şeklinde ilerler. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın birinci bölümünde Suriye'deki olaylar hatırlatıldıktan sonra uluslararası aktörlerin olayı nasıl adlandırdığına değinilecektir. İkinci kısımda bu kimliklerin çıkarları nasıl şekillendirdiği açıklanacaktır. Bunu takiben son kısımda uluslararası anarşinin çatışmaya mı yoksa işbirliğine mi yol açtığı araştırılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yapısal inşacılık, Arap Baharı, Suriye

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to bring a structural constructivist perspective to Arab Spring. With this regard, the international initiation towards Syrian uprising has been taken as case study. Structural constructivism suggests that identities shape the interest of states and that gives a shape to international institutions. As a result of this, according to Alexander Wendt, international anarchy may lead either conflict or cooperation. In this context, having remind the event on Syria, how actors identify the issues in Syria will be adverted. In the second section how these identities shape interests will be investigated. This is followed by the discussion whether international anarchy leads conflict or cooperation.

Keywords: Structural constructivism, Arab Spring, Syria

1. INRODUCTION

The Arab Spring challenges the governments and leaders in Middle East who have been ruling their countries for decades. In contrast to Tunis, Egypt and

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Libya, where the uprisings have resulted in a few weeks, Syria's challenge has been running into the unknown as 17 months. Hence, on the one hand international public opinion pointed out the ongoing "violence" and called for aid to demonstrators as well as sanctions to government. On the other hand some countries such as Russia or China called for "calm dawn" for international initiation to Syria and proposed wait and see politics. The reason why different voices have been raising is that each country defines the issue differently based on their perspectives. This led them to take opposite positions against the issue. In this context, this article analyzes the Syrian conflict by referring to constructivist thesis that is proposed by Alexander Wendt, which is anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt, 1992).

Therefore, the main assumption of the article is that identities and interests are important constitution for the interaction among states, as Wendt argues (Wendt, 1992). Additionally, state centric approach will be kept. Finally, anarchy is self – help if states maximize their interest by competing in security but if they choose collective security, then anarchy is not self – help.

In order to examine these constructivist notions, formal declarations of governments about Syrian dispute will be taken as central part of analysis. Referring to statements, the identities of states will be placed, which leads to comprehend the interests of them. Those analyses will bring us to conclude that whether anarchy is cooperative or competitive in Syrian dispute.

2. IDENTITIES IN SYRIAN CONFLICT

The Arab Spring started on December 2010 in Tunisia and spilled over other Arab states in a short period and Syria had become no exception on March 2011. The Syrian uprising began as 35 people are arrested in a "Day of Dignity" protest in Damascus. Syrian President Bashar Assad indicated the demonstrators as armed terrorist gangs so; the Syrian government took the issue as a threat to national security. In order to keep the security and existence of the state as well as the regime, Syrian government tried to suppress the demonstrators. This led Syria to use armed tools via military forces. Therefore, Syria indicates this conflict as an internal problem that has been occurring between terrorists and state forces. In this regard, the government seeks to keep and promote the national security and citizens from terrorist attacks. Thus, the "identity" of Syria is the legitimacy according to Syrian government, so the conflict should be considered as state vs. terrorists.

The international response to the uprising is Syria on the other hand, differs from each other, simply because of different perspectives towards the issue. The American or more generally Western perspective is almost just opposite of the Syrian government. They take the issue as a struggle between democracy and dictatorship. From that perspective, the "identity" of the Syrian regime and Assad are "dictatorship", so the "democratic" block should transform the "tyrannical"

regime in Syria. As US Secretary of State Clinton indicates: "They need to be assured that Syria will be better off under a regime of tolerance and freedom that provides opportunity and respect and dignity on the basis of...consent rather than the whims of a dictator" (<http://m.state.gov/md178332.htm>). She also blamed Russian delegators in UN Security Council meeting "Whose side are you on, those of the pro-democracy protesters or are you on the side of a brutal dictatorial regime" (<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/node/174>). This is supported by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan as "The path you are on is not a path...I am calling on Assad once more, and this time in a manner he will comprehend, in his own language, You reap what you sow" (<http://english.sabah.com.tr/National/2012/02/08/pm-erdogan-warns-assad-you-reap-what-you-sow>) and blamed Assad as being a cruel who murders his own people. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle also said: "The violence must end immediately. The Syrian government must make sure that basic human and civil rights, as well as the rule of law, is observed" (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/03/24/us-syria-france-germany-idUKTRE72N49O20110324>). Therefore, US and other Western states have entitled Syria and the regime as "dictatorship" whereas, they located themselves in the democratic side of the world. If someone (state) identifies itself as "democratic", then he should act together with "democratic" countries, otherwise he is in the "Other" side of the world and should be named as "dictatorship".

On the other hand, instead of identifying Assad regime as "dictatorship", Russian elite considers it as "moderate" regime against Islamic "extremism". This was indicated by Russian President Medvedev in early 2011, before Libyan intervention as: "medieval call for a crusade, when someone would call on someone to go to a specific place and liberate something" (http://www.rferl.org/content/commentary_russia_watches_arab_spring_24245990.html). Additionally, in case of Syria Putin has warned of the "clash of civilizations" and Medvedev has warned of "extremists" coming to power as a result of the Arab revolutions. UN ambassador of Russia also pointed out that such approaches lead to a never-ending circle of violence (<http://www.aljazeera.com/NEWS/MIDDLEEAST/2011/04/201142723514236533.html>). Thus, In contrast to Western Bolck, the "dictatorship" in Syria is entitled as "moderate" government by Russia. Alternative regimes may shift this "moderate" regime to an "extreme" one.

China also disagrees with Western perspective as well as international initiation. The officials declared that "The future of Syria should be independently decided by the Syrian people themselves free from external interference. We hope the international community continues to play a constructive role in this regard" (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t825290.htm>). Therefore, Chinese government took the issue in the context of sovereignty vs. interventionism. According to China, all states are the "sovereign" governments. Thus they have exclusive authority in their territory. The Other countries are

entitled as “interventionists”. Hence, all governments should manage their own authority. International initiation means “intervention”, which should be avoided.

Therefore, the identities of the states are different from each other. US and its Western allies identify themselves as democratic world, so the opposite of this block is consist of dictatorships. Russia identifies itself as well as Syria as moderate regimes. Thus, world politics should be protected against extremism. Finally, sovereign China does not promote any interventions against independent states.

3. HOW IDENTITIES SHAPE INTERESTS?

This leads us raise the Wendtian constructivist question how identities shape interests. In Syrian case, it should ne started to investigate how the identities determine the policies of Western countries. “Pro – democracy” supporters are unwilling to be occurred a regional instability and war. The importance of democracy – dictatorship distinction has become the main pillar of American national interest since 9/11. US national security report in 2002 had phrased that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few. We must defeat these threats to our Nation, allies, and friends” (The White House, 2002). Hence, America and its allies have been looking for get rid off such safe havens for illegal organizations around the world. Additionally, according to US and its allies, the dictatorship in Syria may cause regional spill – over effect. This leads to expansion of international terrorism, which is considered as national threat towards American people and interests. Therefore, international initiation should be taken to stop terrorist proliferation in Middle East. In brief, the interest of the US and its Western allies are shaped by democracy, which is considered as an antidote against terrorism and other illegal organizations.

On the other hand, moderate Russia’s interest is shaped in a different way. The downfall of moderate Syrian government causes regional chaos from Moscow perspective. This is mainly because of strong relationship between two countries, which had established even during cold war period and established a beneficial status quo for Russia. Thus, collapse of Assad regime would lead regional chaos and rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, since 1940’s, “communist” USSR and its successor Russia has been considering as the greatest threat against religious groups, particularly Islamic sects, simply because of its communist – irreligious identity. As Ben Judah, a policy fellow in European Council on Foreign Relations indicates: “Since 1979 when Soviet tanks entered Afghanistan, Moscow had been at war pretty much non-stop against Islamic militants. Generations of the Russian military and secret services have grown up either fighting the Afghan Mujahedeen or Chechen militants...For Russian politicians, Islamic terrorism have dominated national security briefs throughout

their careers” (<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/node/174>). Therefore, Islamic fundamentalism is considered as leading national security threat towards Russia. Moreover, as it is stated, Russia and Assad regime has strong historical relationship. Collapse of the regime would diminish Russian national interests in Syria in terms of economics and security, particularly owing to weapon trade. Because Russia can not the answer the question what will happen after Assad. An Islamic extremist Syria would not be an ally for former communist Russia. Moreover, such a state may become a safe haven for fundamentalist groups, particularly related with Chechnya. Thus, moderate identity shapes Russian interests to deal with religious extremism. As a result, possible “extremist” Syrian government would damage Russian interests in terms of economy and security.

With respect to sovereignty vs. interventionism distinction, in contrast to Western block, China does not support peace keeping operations around the world. This attitude stems from Chinese own national security concerns by referring to Tibet and East Turkestan issues related to interventionism. Those secessionist movements are suppressed via violence by Chinese government. Thus, supporting any foreign “intervention” against domestic “sovereign” nation might be considered as a peer for future possible peace keeping operation towards China to liberate Tibet and East Turkestan from “dictator” Chinese government. The problem of dictatorship of China against its minorities has been raised by Western democrats and civil societies for last two decades. An international operation towards a country in sake of democracy would result in problem for China in the long run. Hence, sovereignty is the basis of national security concept of China. Interventionism would lead a threat towards nation states.

4. IS ANARCHY WHAT STATES MAKE OF IT?

As a result of different identifications towards the problem, international institutions could not act by unanimity but as results of negotiations. At first stage, the United Nations Security Council did not approve the resolution that calls for Syrian president Bashar Assad to step down by veto of China and Russia. As it is stated, China considers such an attempt as interventionism against independent sovereignty and Russia fears from deepening the chaotic situation. However, in April 2012 an international initiation towards Syria still took place as UN Security Council approved the resolution that suggests deploying 300 observers to Syria, which is proposed by Kofi Annan who is appointed as envoy to deal with Syrian issue. Syrian President Bashar Assad had welcomed observers and provided freedom of movement. However, international public (actually US and its Western allies) blamed Assad as being insincere simply because of ongoing violent of this “cruel” dictator. This shows that “democratic” states are firm to demolish the dictatorship for the sake of international security. On the other hand, Syrian regime claims that Western media is trying to draw a picture against the regime while ignoring the attacks of “terrorist” groups and highlighting government responses to armed groups. The government proves that by

welcoming the international observers and tries to show that what is going on in Syria is actually what Western media broadcasts to public. This causes in international media to provoke a war towards Syria. In this regard, international press several times claimed that Turkey was preparing for a peacekeeping operation towards Syria.

This leads us raise another question that is already asked by Cynthia Weber by referring to Alexander Wendt's famous phrase; is anarchy what states make of it? (Weber, 2010;61) In case of Syrian dispute the answer is yes. The US and its allies call for conflict, whereas China and Russia call for cooperation among states. As a result of veto, peacekeeping operation towards Syria has been obstructed. However, peaceful tools to suspend the conflict have been affirmed by unanimity. Since identities shape interests and interests form international institutions, the United Nations declined conflict between nations but promoted cooperation among them by Chinese and Russian veto for the former and acceptance for the later. If Russia and China identified themselves as democratic, the international initiation would be certainly different. Thus, international anarchy has not been the permissive cause of the war in case of Syrian dispute but identities formed cooperation among them.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the world has divided into separate parts to identify the conflict in Syrian dispute. Western Block has named the issue as struggling for democracy versus dictatorship. This led them to create common interest against "dictatorship". On the other hand, Russia and China have formed different perspectives which results in supporting the current situation in Syria. That means they do not seek to downfall of Assad regime. Finally, Syria took the issue as national security against terrorists. This caused disagreement between two camps at the beginning of the process. However, as a result of interactions and negotiations, the process has been maintaining by converge between different sides of the world and UN Security Council has affirmed another resolution for now, which is a product of negotiation process. Therefore, the interests of the states shape international politics via international institutions, particularly by decisions of United Nations.

This indicates how ideologies of states and nations direct the policies of them. More specifically, international politics is the attitudes of states as the results of their interactions that based on their ideological positions. In case of Syria, "democratic" countries seek to transform the "dictator" Syria via armed forces which leads war. In contrast to democratic countries, sovereign states seek to keep and promote their existence by peaceful tools. In international politics, both armed and disarmed tools are tried to be implemented by international institutions, which are the product of states and their interactions. As it is stated,

United Nations is the tool for security in case of Syria. Its policies are the reflection of the interests of the member states, particularly permanent members.

This led us raise the question whether United Nations is a peace provider institution or war provider. It can not be given an exact answer without understanding the consciousnesses and aims of the states. The Arab uprising in Syria is an appropriate example for that. According to Western side, who define themselves as democratic, the situation in Syria should be suspended by military tools as well as sanctions, because anti democratic dictators could be got rid off only by non democratic ways. This leads war in Middle East. On the other hand, Russia seeks to keep the current regime in Syria, so any military intervention should be avoided. This is similar with Chinese position on the issue. Thus, the attitudes of Russia and China are opposite of the conflict, so they suggest more peaceful tools and cooperation with Syrian government. Therefore, international politics is shaped by political decisions, which are determined by their political thought and interests, in the context of war and peace. In case of Syria, US and his allies seek to manipulate the world politics into the war, whereas China and Russia have been trying to cooperate with central government of Syria in order to solve the conflict.

This raises the question that is asked at the beginning of the article: does anarchy lead to war or peace in the context of Syrian dispute? Although the “democratic” bloc has been calling for peacekeeping operation in Syria, United Nations has not approved a resolution for that as Russia and China seeks for. However, negotiations between groups about the future of Syria take place. Therefore, in the context of Syrian dispute, international anarchy leads cooperation in contrast to realist presume that anarchy is the permissive cause of war.

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