

# **A Feasibility Study of the Greater Middle East Project and the Islamic Awakening in the Middle East**

**Shohreh Jalalpoor\*<sup>1</sup>, Kiyanoosh Paifard<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Falah<sup>3</sup>, Mahdi Rezazadeh Joudi<sup>4</sup>**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Shahreza Islamic Azad University, Esfahan, IRAN.
2. M.A. Political Sciences, Kharazmi University, Tehran, IRAN.
3. M.A. International Relations, Shahreza Islamic Azad University, Esfahan, IRAN.
4. Ph.D. Student of Philosophy and Islamic Theology, Mofid University, Qom, IRAN.

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## **Abstract**

The Greater Middle East Project was put forth by Colin Powel, the Minister of Defense at George Bush Administration on 12 September, 2002. The objectives which have been posed for this plan include: Economic reform, promotion of human rights, establishment of democracy and freedom of election in the Middle East which could be implemented by different instruments and tactics. Of course, it is necessary to detach a division between the announced (explicit) objectives of this plan and hidden objectives of America, because in developing this plan, attempts have been made to have progressive and philanthropic objectives as a cover to its real objectives. The designers of this tricky plan have other objectives in mind. Among these objectives, one may refer to the supply of the security of production and display of energy for America, maintaining the survival of Zionist regime and confrontation with the Political Islam. The question is: What is the nature of recent changes of revolution in the Middle East and to what direction do they incline? The present research has been organized in an analytic-descriptive method and the findings of the research indicate that despite the claims of the analysts and politicians of America to fulfill the Greater Middle East, the colorful presence of Islamic streams at the top of recent changes of the Middle East in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and the presence of religious leaders at the top of the revolutionaries specify that the nature of recent changes is the fulfillment of Islamic Awakening and defeat of the Greater Middle East Project.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, Challenge of American Hegemony, Islamic Awakening, the Greater Middle East Project.

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\*. Corresponding author: shjalalpoor@iaush.ac.ir

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### **Introduction**

Islamic awakening is a title which based on the nature of the recent incidents in the Middle East countries, starting since 2010, is applied to these changes. These revolutionary changes and the wave of Islamic awakening started from Tunisia and gradually spread into the despotic countries of the region and became a model for the protest and rebel in the Arab nations. Amid these, there are a few basic points: First, the Islamic awakening and the efforts to Islam-oriented activities to arrive into the political scene and social activities, second the west and America fear of the defeat of The Greater Middle East Project with a due attention to the growing trend of the Islamic awakening at the level of the region which should not be ignored in the analyses.

The European and American countries intend to connect these rebels (Islamic Awakening) to the economic and welfare issues. Highlighting the role of the youth and showing them as revolutionary figures, they tried to evacuate these rebels from the Islamic contents. Attempts to confront with the arrival of Islam-oriented advocates into the political and ruling structures in Egypt and Libya are the priorities of the west world. In this research, the factors for the creation of Islamic Awakening and its consequences are reviewed, so that, with regard to the objectives and outcomes of The Greater Middle East Project, it could be specified that to what extent America has achieved its own objectives and desires and whether or not basically an Islamic awakening has occurred in the region.

### **1. Definitions**

Before tackling the subject, it seems necessary to explain some of the terminologies:

#### **1.1. The Greater Middle East Project and the New Middle East Plan**

The Greater Middle East Project was posed in 2002. George Bush government was pursuing to legitimize it, so that with a global and regional consensus could fulfill it. Two years later (2004), the defeat of the Summit of the Arab League in Tunisia imposed a hit on Bush government for posing a creditable project on The Greater Middle East in the June Group 8 meeting. Egypt and Saudi Arabia put forth another plan as an alternative for The Greater Middle East which was not successful. With the disintegration of the USSR, America was converted into the sole, large and top power of the region. In the viewpoint of American theoreticians, a set of factors such as the lack of ideological rival, rich resources of the Middle East region, the presence of friend countries in

the same direction with America in the region, etc., motivated America to put its hegemonic reinforcement on the Middle East region at the top of the priorities of its own foreign policies.

In explaining this plan, it should be said that The Greater Middle East Project is based on this assumption that the economic reforms, promotion of the human rights and establishment of democracy in the Middle East with the increase of contribution of the people of the region in the achievements of the economic development and political destiny of their countries will cause the reduction of dissatisfaction and annihilation of the ground for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism (Piterberg, 2004: 90).

The Carnegie Institute for the International Peace in Washington, which is respected so much, published a critical pamphlet against The Greater Middle East Project and Group 8. In that pamphlet, it pointed out that this plan has gone a wrong way from the very beginning. This pamphlet announced that the Bush Plan was not comprehensive and at the same time, it was not based on consultation in its different stages. In addition, the mentioned pamphlet puts a pre-determined action plan before all beneficiaries' parties. This document tells us that the Europeans frequently alerted the Americans that the states in the Middle East should be consulted with and be participated in the concerned process. It is not correct to give it to the concerned parties in a defined framework and an end product. The serious critiques upon this plan include the followings:

- A) The unilateral publication of this plan by America (Yari, 2004: 3-4).
- B) Supplying the benefits of America in the region.
- C) Constant guarantee of security and interests of Israel.
- D) Unilateral status of the plan and lack of consultation with the target countries.
- E) Lack of attention towards the role of America and Europe in creation of the problems of the region (Shakibaei, 2004: 3).

Following the intensive disagreement of the Arabian countries and lack of welcome of the European countries, The Greater Middle East Project was adjusted and in 10 June, 2004, it was approved in the meeting of the Group 8 Sea Island under the new name of ' Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI). The mentioned plan includes two sections. The first section which is allocated to the topic of the necessity of establishment of democracy in the Middle East has a milder tone as compared with the first draft of The Greater Middle East. It is to extent that it comes closer to a general discussion on the

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advantages of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights. The second section, like the first draft is a relatively comprehensive plan for the economic reforms in the region of The Greater Middle East. In The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI) or the very New Middle East, with the adjustment of the tone of the first section, the second section which is allocated to the plan of economic reforms seems to be more outstanding and pursues to improve the previous version of this plan. In addition, opposite to the first draft, in which the issues of Palestine and Israel have been fully ignored, the text of the plan of New Middle East precisely refers to the necessity of efforts to solve the Palestine-Israel issue. Also, following the June Summit, Group 8 with the dissemination of an independent statement emphasized on the necessity of establishment of peace between Israel and Palestine and significance of Road Map (Milton and Hinch, 2006: 153-156).

Despite adjustments, this plan is still known under its primary name, i.e. The Greater Middle East Project. The countries in the region still disagree with this plan intensively and the European countries look at it cautiously. The first meeting of The BMENAI was held in Rabat city in Morocco under the title of Forum for the Future in December 2004. In that event, in addition to the Group 8 Countries, the representatives of a number of the countries of the region such as Pakistan, Morocco and Turkey took part. In fact the Forum for the Future is a framework for the regular meetings of the beneficiary countries to compile and review the progress of the program of reforms in the region. In this framework, parallel with the regular meetings of the political leaders of the related countries, meetings are held between the economic and social leaders in particular the institutions of the civil society of the countries of the region too. In the first meeting of the Forum for the Future in December 2004, the amount of USD Sixty Million was allocated to the approved programs of the meeting.

Precisely, concerning the announced components for the fulfillment of the Greater Middle East Project, certain measures were designed in three areas:

- Promotion of democracy through free elections, education and parliamentary exchanges, participation of women in the political leadership, legal reforms and reform of judicial system, growth of independent public media, promotion of transparency, fighting against corruption;
- Promotion of civil society through exerting pressure on the states of the region to observe the rights of civil institutions and organizations,

financial aids to media and non-governmental organizations of the region, increase of budget (Mahdizadeh, 2004: 32);

- Creating societies relying upon knowledge through presenting financial and technical helps to states and NGO's of the region aiming at reducing illiteracy, establishment of institutes for teacher training, creation new schools, holding meetings comprised of the leaders of public and private sectors, organizations of civil societies of the region and their counterparts in USA and EU to solve the shortage of knowledge in the region of the Greater Middle East;

- Establishment of the institutions in association with private and public sectors of the region to equip the schools with computer and internet, establishment of commercial schools, and expansion of the economic opportunities;

- Founding the financial institutions and development banks, reform in financial sector, promotion of free business, establishment of Forum for the economic opportunities of the Middle East (Yari, 2004: 4).

### **1.2. The Concept of Islamic Awakening**

The Islamic theoreticians consider the Islamic Awakening with regard to and concentration on the noble Islamic values and return to Islamic roots and bases, through which, the Muslims could regain their own past glory. These movements are in fact a real response to the backwardness of recent centuries of the Islamic communities and their humiliations. Thus, the theme of Islamic awakening is not a new thing. This concept has been used by the Islamic thinkers since long time ago and in fact means the concept of following the teachings of the top divine religion (i.e. Islam). Consequently, Islamic awakening means higher life or attempt to achieve it and this life will be received only with the help of religion. Because God has given life to human and the universe and His prophet calls us to what enliven. In other words, Islamic Awakening means the re-enliven in the light of noble Islam in renewing the Islamic life. Furthermore, in the light of it, independence, justice, and all divine lofty teachings and values will be renovated again or find a life. Awakening or Islamic revival is a kind of religious reform, of course not that religious reform that occurred in the west. Because in the religious terminology in its western sense, religion in one way or another undergoes alteration where the religious society is not seen any more, but religion moves ahead with the time and therefore religion moves out from the scene of social life. However the Islamic awakening and revival is to keep life of human and social life based on religion and religious method.

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That is why the dust should be removed from the face of religion, so that the inner side of religion could appear. As a result of this action, religion will return to the human life and Islamic Awakening is to remove obsolete from the religion and cleaning the ambiguities from the Islamic teachings placing on the face of religion. (Shiroodi, 2003: 2).

### **2. Variables Affecting the Islamic Awakening**

Concerning the ground for the display and emerge of Islamic awakening in recent decade in the Middle East region, many components have been effective, which some of the most important ones will be referred to here:

#### **2.1. People Struggle against the Military Despotism of the States in the Region**

A study of the socio-political changes of recent decades shows that the rulers of the Arab countries in the Middle East had taken steps for their survival at the direction of destruction of democracy trend and ignoring the public freedoms and upon observing a slight creativity, they made attempts to suppress it seriously. The noticeable point is that most of these systems have been supported by those who are pursuing to free the people of the region from the claws of ignorance and despotism. (Saleh alUbeidi, 2004: 99). For example, Zine El Abidin Ben Ali, was the president of Tunisia for twenty-three years. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak ruled for more than thirty years and intended to make Jamal, his son his successor. Yemen from 1978 to 2012 had not seen any president except Ali Abdullah Saleh, the leader of the Ruling Party of General People's Congress. Bahrain is a country with hereditary monarchical system in which Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa rules over a society with more than seventy percent of Shias. Muammar al-Gaddafi came into power forty years ago by a coup d'état and calls himself the head of the country. Syria like Libya witnessed coup d'état which was made forty years ago by Hafiz Assad. In recent thirty years, almost in all Arab countries of the Middle East, there have been despotic states in different shapes. Of course, one important point should not be ignored that almost in most of the Arab countries of the Middle East, the government is under the control of military forces and the vast interference of military forces in politics and ruling causes a compound despotism and it is in one way or another in disagreement with any type of democracy and interference of people in their own destiny.

The outcomes of the interference of armed forces of a country in politics are as follows:

A) Fast diminish of credit and reputation of the government or the ruling

political party;

**B)** Gap and multi division among the political leaders, creates a doubt among the military commanders on the ability of civilian rules to administrate the affairs;

**C)** Low possibility of interference of a big world power or the neighboring states in case of occurrence of a coup d'état;

**D)** A very hard and inflexible class structure which makes the military jobs and activities as the only possible way to promote the level of low social position to the social high ranks (Saei, 2005: 241).

On this basis, the revolutionary movements in the Middle East was noticed to remove the military despotism and puppet rulers in these countries and also replacing the ideal governmental system which would be capable to implement the Islamic rules and regulations as desired by revolutionaries, who had this desire in their minds since long time ago.

### **2.2. Failure of Development Project**

In general, the ruling groups in the Arab countries have considered a series of changes inevitable in order to keep their own strategic and pivotal position in the communities under their sovereignty and guaranteeing the benefits and desires of the groups affiliated to them through this control in particular after independence. What highlights the project of development in the Arab Middle East is that these elites have themselves specified the areas which needed to be altered as well as the scope of these alterations. The project of development in the Arab Middle East was implemented to increase the power of the elites in the society and to make it stable rather than to lead to the internal growth, development and dynamism in these countries. However, it became a project under the control of the rulers by which they could reinforce their sovereignty (Daheshyar, 2012: 5).

The project of development only has caused further concentration of the power, more distance of the government from the society, noticeable reduction of responsibility undertaking, and further dependence of Arab governments to the international big players and closing eyes on the tedious living shortages of citizens. It is not a very surprising situation, because the components of the process of development that are taking shapes from down to up, in this project, has been used from up to down, in a selective way, so that authoritative culture and in other words, the position of lack of accepting responsibility in the ruling groups could be more solidified (Daheshyar, 2012: 7).

### **2.3. Interferences of America and the West in Local Affairs of the Countries**

One of the very important factors for tendency towards the Islamic awakening in the countries of the Middle East region can be referred to the interference of the West in particular America under the title of The Greater Middle East Project which was intensified after 11 September attacks and American campaign to the Middle East in the Islamic countries which has injured the dignity of the people in these countries. In this connection, the following indices are worth mentioning:

- **Supporting the Dictators:** As the historical evidences and basically the formal announcement of the politicians show America has been the most basic protector of the dictators such as Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak and even Gaddafi and this support will continue to the extent that it supplies its interests.
- **Attempts to Keep the Infrastructure of the System after the Fall of Dictators:** As the tens of years influence of America and the West not only has assigned the dictator rulers but it has institutionalized dictatorship system and the dependent system to the west in these countries. The next option of America after the fall of its allies in the region will be to support the infrastructure of the system.
- **Confiscating the Revolutions:** Surely the best selection for the American and the west diplomacy to control the recent changes is to ride over the wave of revolutions and participation in the victories. America will try to control that revolution and revolutionaries either during the occurrence of revolutions or after the victory (Soroush and Asgharian, 2011: 139).

### **2.4. Intellectual–Cultural Changes of Arabs**

Intellectual and cultural changes of the Arab nation are the other important local factors in the awakening of this large society. Since 1950's and 1960's, when the trend of gaining political independence in the Arabic countries started, a period of renovation in these countries began. The trend of renovation changed economic and social system of these countries but their political systems remained unchanged. With these interpretations, according to the theory of Samuel Phillips Huntington who considers the political, economic and social inharmonious development as the cause of revolution, this case can be considered among the factors of alteration of the Arab states.

According to the theory of Huntington, when the state does not deal with the political renovation in harmony with the economic renovation, it will face with the resistance of a broad amount of the middle class, which is the result of economic renovation, the daily increase of people awareness and promotion of expectations for contribution and



influencing the method of administrating the country in one side and remaining of the traditional political system, without any kind of renovation and reform in the other side. In that case, it has not ability to respond the public broad expectations which is resulting from their political growth and development. Consequently, it causes imbalance and finally protesting to the political system. In addition to renovation, two other important factors have had roles in the intellectual-cultural changes of the Arab society. One is the mass media that at the age of communication have had broad impact on the thought and culture of the people of the region and the other one is the migration and touristic factors which in the interaction among the Arab communities and other spots of the world have created deep changes in the Arab thought and culture, in particular in its middle classes, in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Adami, 2011: 66). The objectives and strategies to achieve these objectives should be detached in The Greater Middle East Project.

### **3. The Explicit Strategies of America in Practicing the Greater Middle East Project**

America in the position of the main designer of The Greater Middle East, in addition to the human and ideological objectives that it states (and necessarily does not believe in any of them), has known and hidden strategies which will be reviewed further.

#### **3.1. Expansion of Democracy**

US, as the largest capitalist country, after 11 September incident found out that a noticeable part of violation and terror which occur have roots in the dissatisfaction of the developing countries in particular the Middle East and are resulting from the west political, economic performance and the security system in ignoring an important part of their interests and also the suppression of their old ideals including the creation of Palestine state. Thus, the strategy of America took shape based on the change in the trend of the Middle East in order to make it an associate to the interests and objectives of the system of global political and economic system. In this case, Bush announced, 'Our long term strategy should be to replace the pervasive suffocation, prejudice and corruption in the region with freedom, democracy and welfare. War against terrorism is only one part of the broad blueprint (Richard 2005: 137).

In fact, the capitalist countries came to this conclusion that political instability and corruption and also conflict over power in the absence of democracy prevents the economic growth in the Arab countries. The

authoritative and suppressive regimes in the Arabic Middle East, that up to yesterday used to supply the needs of America in the most ideal form and in a least cost, with the emergence of change in the international system and different understanding of the regional and international players of the role and interest of America in the world, were no more able to respond to the needs and method of supply of interest of that country traditionally and solely. The nature of the states of the region and their structural dependence to the foreign powers, in particular the America in its traditional form had no agreement with the changing and global spreading interests of America. This nature and dependent behavior, more than any time in the past, leads to the increase of fragility of the sovereignties and non-democratic policies in the region and increases the passivity of the mentioned communities against the methods of terrorism and their slogans (Daheshyar, 2008: 13).

### **3.2. Free Elections**

Creating necessary capacities for free elections is one of the indices being announced for The Greater Middle East Project to practice this plan. But this change had various messages. Holding free elections in some of the Islamic countries showed that in lack of interference of the state, the Islamic movements can easily penetrate into the state and bring the power under their control.

The victory of Islamists in the elections of their own countries was in no way in agreement with the intentions of the designers of The Greater Middle East. The lack of welcome in the side of people and failure of liberal parties in these countries means the lack of acceptance of western-American values and is considered a reaction towards the policies of America in the region. In fact, the Islamists, either within the framework of Islamic movements being altered or within the framework of modern intellectual streams, have taken positive and growing steps and have been able to enter themselves amid the local and regional players and redefine many of the political relations or regional crises (Pourahmadi, 2010: 649). In the continuation of discussion, some samples of the victories of Islamists in the elections of their countries are referred to:

- Movement of Islamic Resistance of Palestine (HAMAS). It is an Islamist group which in the election of 2006 in the Parliament of Legislation of Palestine could win most of its chairs and was practically identified as the most important rival to FATH Movement. The victory of Islamists shows the growth of Islam orientation and lack of success of the policies of America and Israel in Palestine and the region (Abbasi Ashlaghi, 2012: 130);

- The west-oriented state of Saad Hariri in Lebanon failed with the initiative of Hezbollah of Lebanon and a state in support of the resistance came into power;
- In Tunisia, the Islamists party of Al-Nahthah, led by Rached Ghannouchi, after years of hidden activities could override the rivals with 89 chairs out of the total 217 chairs. But concurrently, the important parties of secular liberal or left like congress nationalist left party for the republic with 29 chairs, party of people statement with 26 chairs, the historical left party with 36 chairs are very important weights in the parliament of Tunisia;
- In Egypt, in the first part of the elections of this country which was held in some of the big cities, the Party of Justice and Freedom (Ikhvan al Muslemin) won about 37 percent, the Al-Nur Islamist Party, won 24 percent and Al-Vasit Islamic Party won 4 percent of votes. At the same time, six election lists of liberal-secular parties with 30 percent were placed in minority and finally the victory of Ikhvan al Muslemin and presidential of Mohammad Mursi in Egypt, after revolutionary change, gave an outstanding manifestation to the growth of Islamic orientation;
- In the election of 2012, Islamist Party of Justice and Development which had taken power in Turkey since 2002, with 83/49 percent of the total votes, could win 327 chairs out of the total 550 chairs. At the same time, the Republican Party of Khalq (People) with 25/98 percent of votes could win 135 chairs and National Movement Party with 13/1 percent of votes could win 52 chairs. Thirty five candidates also entered into the parliament of this country independently and will be the partners of Islamists in administration of the country. (Gohari Moghadam, 2012: 228-229).

In fact the paradox of The Greater Middle East Project was made to respond the peoples' demands; while keeping the inefficient and authoritative rulers and these conflicts were among the reasons for the formation of instability in the countries in the region. America in the project of The Greater Middle East did not notice to sociological factors and in particular the role of religion and culture and designed the reforms within the framework of liberal democracy and consequently, The Greater Middle East Project faced a serious failure. (Amir Abdullahian, 2012: 31).

### **3.3. Fighting Against Terrorism**

American statesmen introduced the Middle East as the root of religious terrorism and enumerated it as a threat to America and the west. The incident of 11 September, 2001 also provided an opportunity for America

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to put the principles and bases of its foreign policy in this direction and with a publicizing on the centrality of Middle East, to attribute terrorism to it in the minds of the public. In this propagation-based process, Islam and sacred concepts such as Jihad and martyrdom were introduced as the main factors for the emergence of terrorism in the Middle East. Thus, the Americans announced that they intend to annihilate terrorism and this demands basic changes to be made in the Middle East. So, they presented The Greater Middle East Project and propagated it in the media and posed it intensively even in the world meeting (Shiroodi, 2003: 10).

Dick Cheney, Vice President of America on January 2003 in the World Economic Assembly said, "Terrorism and violations hidden in it and also the energy of this phenomenon in the murder of humans shows that we should act urgently to confront with this dangerous phenomenon. Because this danger demands people and states of the region to consider the following triple responsibilities to fight against terrorism:

- Confrontation with the ideologies of violation in the fountainhead through spreading the democracy in the Greater Middle East;
- Collective cooperation among all states to confront with this danger;
- Being prepared to use force and direct threats at the time of defeat and failure of diplomacy (Ariyayi Nia, 2008: 25).

In fact, interferences of America in the Middle East and North Africa (1983 in Lebanon, 1990-1991 in the Persian Gulf, 1993 in Somalia, 2002 in Afghanistan, 2003 in Iraq) and contempt resulting from it have been important and basic factors for the increase and intensification of this type of Islam inclination and instability in the region. For example, the occupation of Iraq and performance of the USA in the period of occupation have motivated the Islamists groups and other forces to the extent that the Sunni secular leftists of the Middle East and Islamists, which in the past were against each other, to stand beside each other and caused their reinforcement (Hafeziyan and Ahmadiyan, 2009: 72). In fact, one of the common features of all Islamic movements in the region is that they consider western orientation as a rejected action and consider the unquestioned acceptance of the west world with irreligious models as the factors for disorganization of the Muslim communities. On the other hands, the Islamic movements consider America and Israel as the biggest enemies of Islamic communities and the Muslims and believe that quarrel of Islamists against America and Israel is neither a religious quarrel with Christianity and Judaism but a tyranny-fighting challenge (Pourahmadi, 2010: 652).

Islamic fundamentalists after the incident of 11 September came to this conclusion that “we should direct the fight towards an enemy whose hands are making fires in our countries to burn their hands. It is not possible any more to focus only on the close enemy, since the cross-Zionist coalition led by USA does not permit the Islamists to come into power in any part of the world. Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, also advocated that America and its allies have voiced war against God and the Muslims. He believed that America is responsible for the blood of the Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Kashmir, Somalia, Eritrea, and Chechen, Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Abbas Zadeh Fathabadi, 2009: 123).

As it was stated, one of the characteristics of the Islamic Awakening and also indices of Islamic orientation in this classification is to fight against the interferences of America in the region. The recent social revolutions in the Middle East, which have been created based on the configuration of Islamic discourse, have a confronting attitude against the global dominating order. This discourse criticizes any kind of hegemony of the western countries in confrontation with the Middle East units (Motaghi, 2012: 168). Islamic movements have registered their roles in the changes of the Middle East in line with the revival of Islamic identity and confrontation with the presence of Israel and foreign influence and dominance (Pourahmadi, 2010: 644).

#### **4. Hidden Strategies of America in the Greater Middle East Project**

As it was said earlier, the American politicians have been pursuing their real objectives at the back of the mask of philanthropic, progressive and development-oriented objectives of The Greater Middle East Project. That is in fact to increase their financial benefits and annihilate the culture and values of the Middle East. In the continuation of the discussion, some of the important and hidden strategies of America in this plan are posed.

##### **4.1. Guaranteeing the Energy Flow**

In the present international system oil is an important factor for the rate of power of countries. It specifies the position and rank of the nations on possessing or method of access to resources in the international balance of the power. Thus, the strategy of USA, in particular after the disintegration of the USSR, is to have a greater dominance over the oil resources and to control the routes of free transfer of energy to the consumption market and directly to control the economy of the capitalistic world. If America has no control over the oil of the Persian

Gulf, the power of this country to control the key regions in other parts of the world will also be reduced intensively (Heshmatzadeh, 2004: 10).

America is one of the important players of this scene. Thus, energy, in particular oil and gas, has important roles in the economy of the USA. On the other hands, the incidents which happen in a thousand miles away and out of the control of USA can disrupt the energy and economy of America. The economic recession, which has been created following the shocks of oil market in 1970's, the oil embargo of 1973, the occurrence of Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the Persian Gulf War in 1991 are examples confirming these ideas (Khadem, 2005: 111).

#### **4.2. Improvement of the Trend of Peace of the Middle East and Guaranteeing the Security of the Israel**

The significance of Israel in the policy of America is to the extent that John J. Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz believe the orientation of the policy of USA in the Middle East is mainly its commitment towards Israel rather than merely oil interests. If the oil companies or the oil producing countries had oriented the policies, America would have tried to defend Palestine instead of Israel. In addition, it did not move towards war against Iraq and did not threaten Iran by military forces. It seems that with the implementation of The Greater Middle East Project, the Zionist regime of Israel is the main winner in the political, economic and security aspects. As for political-security aspects, the obligations of the Middle East states in confrontation with the Islamists streams, which basically do not intend to agree the existence of the Zionist regime of Israel, supplies the security of this regime. The Greater Middle East Project, in addition to the political aspect, will bring about superfluous interests economically for Israel. The common market of the Middle East, that America is pursuing to create, will encompass Israel too and will cause the dominance of Israel on the economic relations and equations of the Middle East (Motaharnia, 2004: 102).

#### **4.3. Posing the Shia Crescent**

Mainly after the occupation of Iraq in 2003, some scholars insist on the formation of Shia geopolitics vis-à-vis Sunni geopolitics and claim that Iran in the position of the strongest Shia country in the region pursues to use this reality for the improvement of its own ideological objectives and interests. Perhaps the time that the White House was pursuing to implement and perform The Great Middle East Project, it did not think that the influence of Iran and Shias becomes greater than the past. However, the elections in Iraq and Palestine Legislative Council, changes in Lebanon and also the occurrence of the thirty three day war of

Hezbollah and Israel changed the situations in the region. On one hand, the politicians and on the other hand the thinkers noticed these issues and incidents. In this connection, two claims were put concurrently.

Firstly, the power of the Shias in the region has led to the formation of a Shia block and secondly, the Shia block will be directed by Tehran (Pourahmadi and Jamali, 2010: 10).

Shia Crescent was an instrument by which America could achieve its primary objectives which are the very long term presence in the region of the Persian Gulf and in the heart of this region, i.e. Iraq, thereby; it could reach its own objectives in the region. For having a better and easier access to its own constant interests, including the objectives of The Greater Middle East Project in the region and consequently at the global scene, USA used the Shia Crescent as an instrument and it still continues. The purpose of Saudi Arabia to put the threat of the Shia Crescent is to confront with local and foreign pressures to make political, social, economic and cultural local reforms. Employing this strategy and also interfering in local affairs of Iraq, also intensifying the local conflicts in that country, as admitted by the American officials, the Saudi Arabia could immerse America in the marsh of Iraq and with this tool, it could release from the crashing pressures of America in the early days after the 11 September incident (Marouf, 2013: 272).

Edward Said, makes a pathological study over the fear from Islam and Shia and mentions three important reasons for it: First, the dreadful sense of the west on need to the energy and its concentration in the world of Islam, therefore the plan of fear of Shia [Shia phobia] can cause the intensification of conflict between Islamist and Islamic countries to prevent any crises as the Islamic Awakening in the flow of transfer of cheap oil price to the west. Second, Islamic Revolution of Iran, which has presented concepts and potentials for struggle against hegemony, seeking justice and political rationality and will become the successful model of political Islam for the Islamic movement in modernity age. The third reason is the return of Islam to the political life of the Muslims (Sotudeh and Moghimi, 2013: 253).

Some of the measures being forecasted by the decision makers in the White House to control the Shia Crescent are as follow:

- Using the Shia and Sunni conflicts and adding fuel to it to prevent the formation of Shia Crescent;
- Attracting the views of the big powers to introduce the groups dependent on the Shias in Lebanon like Hezbollah, as the terrorist groups to create international speculation of Iran and imposing restrictions

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against Islamic Republic of Iran because of defending Hezbollah;

- Using the Kurds to control the power of the Shias of Iraq and creating a regional balance;
- Utilizing the border, ethnic and national disputes among the Shia countries and neighbors like using Saddam Hussein to launch war between the two Shia countries of Iran and Iraq;
- Creating a security belt in the limits of Iranian and Syrian borders which demands the capture of border regions between these two countries;
- Creating the Sunni brotherhood emperors led by Egypt against the Shia Crescent led by Islamic Republic of Iran (Marouf, 2013: 277).

### **5. Obstacles Existing Against the American Greater Middle East Project**

With regard to the evidences, it can be said that so far The Greater Middle East Project has faced many obstacles and difficulties in practice. Firstly, this assumption that the foreign forces can cause the establishment of democracy in the region is at least controversial and questionable. The experience of Iraq in the past years has shaken the bases of this assumption seriously. Secondly, America, due to its past performance and its unconditional backup to Israel and support the dictatorship systems in the region, does not have the essential credit in the public opinion of the region who are mainly anti-Israel to be able to play the role of savior of democracy easily.

Military attack to Iraq and Afghanistan and unquestionable support of Israel, have darkened the image of America in the public opinion of the region and has created greater sensitivity against the interferences of America in the region. With these interpretations, there are many structural problems and obstacles in the way of implementation of explicit and implicit strategies of The Greater Middle East Project that makes its success facing with many serious problems:

- The most important problem of America in the region is Islam, its features and religious beliefs of people;
- The problem of Palestine is one of the deep-rooted dilemmas in the region and as long as it is not solved properly, America will remain unable in implementing the plans and attracting the views of people;
- Performing The Greater Middle East Plan in the first stance will lead to weakness and fall of despotic systems of the region. This issue deprives America from Sunni allies who are its contact points in the region;
- Performing the plans which confronts the region with crises and



disorder has made America face with serious conflicts;

- In the event of holding free elections of the countries of the region, of the possible options for victory in election that enjoy much popularity among people are Islamists and anti-American groups (As we observed in Egypt and other Arab countries);
- The countries of the region are not homogenous. They include a broad spectrum of types of states, coup d'état states, Sheikh Settlement States, kingdom, life presidential, pseudo-west presidential, religious democracy and indigenous states (Neep, 2004: 43);
- In the region, the model of Islamic Republic of Iran presents a type of religious democracy which is mostly in agreement with the conditions of the region and to a great extent is giving inspiration to the Islam searching movements and religious democracy;
- The fall of Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam in Iraq provided favorable conditions and opportunities for Iran. America does not want in any way to create a greater opportunity and benefit for Iran in the region.

## **6. Causes of Defeat of the Greater Middle East Project and Victory of Islamic Awakening**

World of Islam, in particular in recent two decades, has been facing with the waves of seeking Islam and Islamic awakening and this stream has been constantly noticed by the leaders and reformers of world of Islam and various Islamic movements in the Middle East and North Africa besides the desire to shaping a united Ummah. However, the changes in recent years in the region have added to the necessity of awakening of the Muslims and Islamic Awakening. Concerning the recent changes of the Middle East, there are many analyses. In particular, using the meaningful terms such as Arabic Spring and replacing it with the phrase of Islamic Awakening, the westerners deal with sterilizing and removing this Islamic rebel from the Islamic thoughts and motivations and introducing it as a post-modern, scattered, without leadership revolution or another wave of liberal and democratic revolutions. And if being forced, they define these changes within the framework of post-Islamic revolutions which do not claim political Islam attitudes. While undoubtedly, the present changes have been under the impacts of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 and various researchers have proved this with reasoning (Hazegh Nikroo, 2012: 41).

As it was said earlier, in The Greater Middle East Project, there is an emphasis on the obligation of the agreement of the regional order with the new world order. The present order at global level is a single pole,

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secular and interest-based order. But it seems that the order under evolution in the Middle East is multiple, Islamists and identity-based order (Salehi, 2012: 87). Thus, the regional order in the process of evolution in the Middle East will not be in agreement with the established world order. In fact, it has been accepted that order in the region of the Middle East, due to impact from the identity and civilization paradigms, in short term and with secular terms and even military imposition will not be possible and these types not only will not have any results but also it will cause the highlight of the identity nature of the region within the framework of Islamic movements. The Islamic movements at present have been converted into one of the influential regional players of the Middle East (Pourahmadi, 2010: 668).

Thus, the macro strategy of America in the region is to create an identity balance between the Shia revolutionary order, the liberal moderate order and Salafi movement radical order. America notices that in any way, at least in short term, it is not possible to establish liberalistic reforms and changes due to the Islamic nature of the region and pursuing these reforms has had fully reverse results. It is to the extent that the Islamic parties and movements have moved up higher from the ladder of the power more than any time in the past. The presence of America in the region and its support extending to the authoritative states of the region not only led to intensification of Islamic advocates, but also the hate towards this country in the region has had an increasing growth. For this reason, America pulled out its forces from Iraq and almost left this country without any attention and intends to remove its costly and unfruitful obligations in the Middle East region. Thus, America tries to manage and keep the order and stability of the region within the framework of power balance by creating and giving role to these three orders which have identity natures.

Amid these, it is possible to refer to some of the confessions of the west political theoreticians in the west in particular on return of religion to the political scene of the world. For example, Samuel Huntington emphasizes on the role of Islam and Islamic civilization in the future world and considers it a lasting and surviving movement (Ghane basari, 1999: 7). It seems that the main objective of The Greater Middle East Project, prior to reaching to oil or controlling EU, China and Russia is to change and adjust the beliefs, words and functions of Islamic and Shia communities and in a more explicit word to isolate the religion of Islam. Therefore, state building, nation building, elite building, culture building and religion-building, which are placed inside the teaching of the foreign

policy of USA, should be certainly put in the light of its pivotal objective which is the annihilation of the divine religion of Islam.

### **Conclusion**

The necessity of political, economic and social reforms in the Middle East region in order to establish democracy, observing the human rights, improving the economic performance and contribution of people in the political destiny and economic achievements of their countries which had been designed under the name of The Greater Middle East Project by America for this region has faced defeat with regard to the changes of recent years.

Among the important reasons for the failure of this plan, this point can be pointed out that the reforms will be fruitful when they are introvert and be designed such that the political structure of the related countries have abilities to perform it. But with regard to the extrovert nature of The Greater Middle East Project, which has been prepared by America for the countries of the region, and also the colorful presence of Islamic streams such as Ikhvan al Muslemin (Muslims Brotherhood) at the top of recent changes of the Middle East in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, etc. and the presence of religious leaders at the top of revolutionaries, the religious symbols and the Islamic slogans had caused the analysts to consider the Islamic nature of them as the most important components of these changes and thus, we witness the occurrence of Islamic awakening in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the experience of America in compiling The Greater Middle East Project, in particular its actions in the region shows that these changes without good intention of its administrators and also supplying the cooperation and consent of the people in the region, in particular the unilateral military actions, can postpone the democratic changes of the region for a noticeable period of time. Renovation and democratization of the Middle East region is in need of keeping and reinforcing the social institutions of the countries in the region. The military methods cause the annihilation of these institutions which make the establishment of democracy more difficult. The American policymakers, without having a good intention in announced objectives, within the framework of The Greater Middle East Project only pursue their own hidden objectives including the supply of energy, supply security, survival of the Zionist regime, fighting against the political Islam, etc.

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The evidence for this claim is the practical measures of this country in the region and its direction in opposing the revolutionary forces and desire of people in recent Islamic Awakening in the Middle East. The recent changes of the Middle East for surely is the outcome of various and interconnected causes including sense of relative depravity of the people in the countries of the region (in political, economic, cultural and educational dimensions), detachment of people from the state and its dependence on foreign powers, despotism of the states and trampling the political and civil rights of individuals, corruption and inefficiency of the states, Islamic awakening, and taking models after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. This immense incident made the retrieval of the Islamic identity and this peoples' desire was manifested in their slogans during the revolution. The victory of Islamist parties in the countries show the will of people to perform the teachings of Islam and shifting a main role to religion in the future changes of this region.

What is observable during the recent revolutionary changes in the Middle East region is a new experience which is justifiable only with the concept of Islamic Awakening. What is observed now in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain and many other countries, is the Islamic Awakening? People themselves have arrived into the scenes. The nations themselves have made attempts to bring their destiny under their control. This is one of the extraordinary big and detrimental incidents. The presence of America in the region and extending support to the authoritative states of the region not only has led to the intensification of Islamic attitudes but also the hate towards this country has had an increasing growth which is appraisable in apparent contradiction with The Greater Middle East Project.

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