

Religious Challenges Toward China's Military Activities in the Middle East*

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Abstract

Three international systems — the Westphalian system, Islamic international system, and tribal system — are coexisting and intertwining present day in the Middle East. The rise and expansion of Islamic international system in this region are closely related to the revival of Islamic trend of thoughts. Since the 1950s, military topics have been involved in China's Middle East policies, which meets the historical background when China opposed then modern international system and tried to expanded socialism international system. After the 1990s, especially after entering the 21st century, because of the Islamic system, problems revolving religious beliefs are increasing in China's peacekeeping and escort operations. On issues revolving religions, China's military activities in the Middle East have its unique successful experiences as well as some places that need to be improved in the new system against the new backdrop, including correctly understanding the religious beliefs, relationship between Chinese soldiers and religious beliefs, domestic Muslim factors and legislations of overseas military activities that related to religious issues, which are vital to the future development.

Keywords: Islamic international system, Chinese peacekeeping forces, escort fleet, religions and beliefs.

Çin'in Orta Doğu'daki Faaliyetlerine Yönelik Dini Sorunlar

Öz

Üç uluslararası sistem – Vestfalya sistemi, İslami uluslararası sistem ve kabile sistemi – bugün itibariyle Orta Doğu'da bir arada var olmaya devam etmektedir. Bölgedeki İslami uluslararası sistemin yükselmesi ve yayılması İslami düşüncelerin

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tekrar canlanmasıyla yakından ilişkilendirilmektedir. Askeri konular, Çin'in dönemin modern uluslararası sisteme karşı çıkıp uluslararası sistemde sosyalizmi yaymaya çalıştığı 1950'lerden beri, ülkenin Orta Doğu politikaları arasında yer almaktadır. 1990'lardan sonra özellikle 21'inci yüzyıla girerken, İslami sistem sebebiyle özellikle dini inanışlara ilişkin problemler, Çin'in barış koruma ve refakat operasyonlarının kapsamında yer almaya başlamıştır. Dinleri kapsayan konularda; Çin'in Orta Doğu'daki askeri faaliyetleri, kendine özgü başarılı deneyimlere sahip olmakla birlikte, dini inanışların doğru anlaşılması, Çin askerleri ile dini inanışlar arasındaki ilişki, Mümin faktörler ve dini meselelere ilişkin denizaşırı askeri faaliyetlere yönelik yasalar gibi kalkınmaya yönelik bazı konularda yeni sistemin oluşan yeni bir temelde geliştirilmesi gerekliliği görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslami uluslararası sistem, Çin barış koruma kuvvetleri, refakat kuvvetleri, dinler ve inanışlar.

Introduction

Transformation of international system has been the focus of the academic circle since the end of the Cold War. Western powers represented by the US and EU countries, and non-Western emerging powers represented by forces such as the BRICs headed by China, are all participating in the institutional design under the transformation of the system. However, as a region and a civilization, Islamic regions in the Middle East become increasingly marginalized and continuously strained by conflicts and hot wars. During the period between the 1950s and the 1970s, China supported the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, pan-socialism and communist military struggles of countries and military organizations. China's supports at that time were related to the Communist Party of China's (CPC) challenges to then international system which was dominated by the West and its ignorance to the Islam nature of relevant countries and organizations. Around the end of the Cold War, Chinese military forces kicked off its peacekeeping operations in the Middle East region, including countries such as Lebanon and Sudan. In 2008, anti-pirate military escort operations have also been started in the Gulf of Aden.

It has been pointed by Chinese President Hu Jintao in his report at 18th Party Congress that "China's armed forces have always been a staunch force upholding world peace and will continue to increase cooperation and mutual trust with the armed forces of other countries, participate in regional and international security affairs, and thus play an active role in international political and security fields". Meanwhile, he also stressed that "we must unwaveringly adhere to the principle of the Party's absolute leadership over the armed forces and continue to educate them in the system of theories of

socialism with Chinese characteristics. We should constantly cultivate the core values of contemporary revolutionary service personnel, vigorously promote advanced military culture, and preserve the nature and the character of the military as the people's army" ¹.

The Middle East is the core region of the Islamic system. Thus, Islam will inevitable become the important object that faced by China's military activities. It is worth thinking carefully on how to properly react to questions and challenges rose by Islamic countries and their people and even some extreme Islamic organizations toward Chinese military forces.

Evolution of the international system in the Middle East

Actually, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 as well as the 9/11 attacks and the internationalization of Taliban forces respectively represent the rises of three principles in international relations (IR) — the Westphalian system, Islamic international system and tribal system. The development of these three systems can be seen as a process that evolves keeping in pace with the development of the trend of thoughts in the Middle East, in which three systems intertwine with the others. Such phenomenon makes the situation in the Middle East more complex and increases the difficulties for the studies on IR in the region. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the evolution and transformation of these three international systems.

1. The Westphalian System

European colonialism has contributed to the Middle East countries' participating to the Westphalian system. The Peace of Westphalia, which was signed in 1648, has been defined as the beginning of the modern IR. After 30 years' turmoil and destruction in European history brought out by the religious war led by the religious conflicts in Germany between two religious camps in the Europe, secular principles, including the principle of modern nation-states and principle of the sovereignty of states, were identified by European countries. At that time, IR in the modern sense can only be found among European countries, especially Western European countries. With the coming of a global era opened up by traditional European powers, Europe's IR principles have spread worldwide and countries all over the world have been included in the framework of modern IR. Since ancient times, European

¹ Jintao Hu, *Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects — Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on November 8, 2012.*

countries have had close contacts with Mediterranean coastal Arab countries. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, forces from countries including the UK, France and Italy inroad to the Middle East and established the colonial rule in the name of mandatory administration. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire made it possible of the spread of modern IR principles in Islamic Middle East, as Daniel Philpott expressed that “They in effect imposed the Westphalian system on it and forcibly turned it into a collection of ethnically defined nation-states”, “Ataturk made a virtue of necessity and embraced the Western nation-state and Europeanization as essential to Turkey’s progress”². However, actually, prior to this, Sultanate of Nejd (today Saudi Arabia) had participated in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 with internationally recognized independent status, which is in fact the beginning of Arab countries’ joining in the Westphalian system. After the World War II, countries in the Middle East region become independent and made the establishment of Westphalia-style sovereign states as their goals. For this reason, national liberation movements in the Middle East were a part of the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. With the rise of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, voices that calling for a unified Arab, with Nasser as its leader, become increasingly louder. However, against such backdrop, only a few Arab countries, such as Libya and Syria, gave a short-lived response to this wave of Arab nationalism while the rest remained their status as regional nation-states with Westphalia-style sovereignty. All countries in the Middle East are strictly compliant with the modern IR principles in their participation in international exchanges, which is the legality cornerstone of the exchanges among Middle East sovereign states and their foreign exchanges with the outside world.

2. Islamic System

Current Westphalia-style principle of sovereignty is tailored for European countries. Hence, the principles of sovereignty and nations are products of the Thirty Years’ War. Due to the loss and shock brought by the religious war, religions have been regarded as the fuse of turmoil, disorder and wars in Europe. For this reason, after the resolving of the religious problems, the religions were banished from European internal affairs and inter-state politics among European countries. For the religious problems were no longer serious problems, the divine principles of Westphalia, which laid down the independent entity status of nation-states, mutual non-interference in internal affairs and the inalienable right of sovereignty, was

² Daniel Philpott & Timothy Shah, “Faith, freedom, and federation: the role of religious ideas and institutions in European political convergence”, in Timothy Byrnes & Peter Katzenstein, eds., *Religion in An Expanding Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.39.

established then by European countries based on the de-politicization of divine religions. Egypt and Israel's negotiation for peace meant the end of Nasser Arab nationalism, and Iran's becoming a theocratic republic in 1979 after being westernized meant Islamic principles' revises on Westphalian principles. A theocratic republic itself is a mixture of Islamic principles and Westphalian principles: First, influenced by Christianity's returning to IR after the Cold War, in the whole Islamic world, Islam has never been mentioned in Westphalian principles, hence it has not been "banished" from modern IR. Second, plight brought out by unsuccessful modernization in the Middle East coupled with corruption and depravity brought by successful modernization jointly led to the revival of traditional Islamic values: Iran exported revolutions to the world at the core of Khomeini-ism and aimed to establish a community of Islamic radicalism including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine; Saudi Arabia carried out principles against Nasserism and Khomeini-ism, trying to create a international Islamic camp with the Organization of the Islamic Conference as its main framework; after the Cold War, Islamic extremism represented by Al-Qaeda established the extremism and terrorism network worldwide. These three systems jointly constitute the Islamic international system, which goes beyond the principles of sovereignty and non-interference under the Westphalian system. In this Islamic system, sovereignty is belongs to Allah, which comes from the holy *Qur'an*.³

3. Tribal System

To a large extent, Islam's spread in Arabian Peninsula after the 7th century was a process against tribal idolatry and emphasis on consanguinity. In ancient times, the Middle East has long been provinces of the Ottoman Empire. After being detached from the Ottoman Empire, most of the countries within this region were created by the West, most of which have not completely achieved the goal of constructing a nation-state even till today. These West-created countries, especially ones in the Arab world, are tribal alliances essentially. There is no obvious difference between the concepts "domestic" and "foreign" among Arab countries, that's why tens of thousands of Libyans have crossed the border to enter Egypt to pursue Arab unity, refugees in Gaza have pulled down the wall on border and went to Egypt. To most Arabs, even Iraq's invasion to Kuwait has been viewed as internal affairs instead of an incident that related to international laws based on Westphalian system. As the coming of an era of global governance, sub-national actors have also been participants of IR, which is an increasingly obvious trend in the Middle East region especially after the tribes' being involved in IR in 2001.

³ "For Allah alone is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth." (*Sura Ash-Shuraa* Chapter 42: Verse 49).

Taliban, which had lost regime in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks and then settled in Pashtun tribes located around the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, has already been a spokesman of the Pashtun tribes to bring international claims to a large extent. During the turmoil in Libya since the beginning of 2011, many tribes that opposed Gaddafi bypassed their country and cooperated with multinational forces on their own, which is another typical case of tribes' direct participating in IR. Tribal system attaches more importance in tribal interests than nation-state and sovereignty. Therefore, they have not enough recognition on Westphalia-style nation-state and sovereignty, and have even contradictions with Islamic principles.

In short, three international systems are coexisting and intertwining present day in the Middle East. Only by in-depth studying the real relationships among the Middle East history, religions and nations, can the development law of IR in this region be summarized. Although the global proliferation of the Middle East tribal system has already achieved some results⁴, to a large extent, it remains cloaked by Islam. To some extent, tribal system can be seen as a variant of Islamic international system. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, factors, including the Gulf War, the 9/11 attacks, the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and the turmoil in the Middle East since 2010, jointly led to the rise and taking power of Islamic forces in the Middle East countries. Such phenomenon is inextricably linked with the revival of Islamic trend of thoughts in the Middle East.

The revival of Islamic trend of thoughts is a complex concept. The initial phase of the rise of Islamic trend of thoughts started from Prophet Muhammad's beginning to preach to AD 632. Muhammad's preaching was not limited to anti-idolatry; it has also created the Islamic trend of thoughts. In Arabic, the term "Islam" means peace and obedience, which is the core of the claims of Muhammad. The theocratic Ummah he established later is the reflection of this idea. As the last prophet, he has established the first theocratic regime. After Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam entered the period of four caliphs. Caliphs are religious leaders as well as political leaders at the same time. There are two main lines of trends of thoughts in the Middle East currently: the separation of church and state, and anti-monarchy thoughts. The former mainly exist among Sunnis, and has no conflict with the politics-religion alliance, while the latter mainly refers to Shiites.⁵ These two main lines, coupled with the nationalism from the West, have led to intense conflicts in the Middle East. Islam positions itself as the "Final Divine Religion",

⁴ Such as the new kind of international actors: Sub State Government or Sub State Tribe.

⁵ Such as Iran's hostility to Gulf monarchies since 1979.

therefore, many Arabs advocating Islam fundamentalism and opposing the separation of church and state because it might undermine Islamic tradition of excellence; facing the culture shock from the West, they hold that the revival of Islam is the deep-rooted way out.⁶ Against such backdrop, Shiite Muslims try to reproduce Ummah, like Iran's establishment of a theocratic republic⁷, while some Sunni fundamentalism Muslims take a more extreme way, such as the terrorism ideas and relative activities of Osama bin Laden that come from Wahhabi. Besides, still some social elites advocate Islamic Centrism.⁸ However, the proportion of this group is quite small comparing the other political elites who praise highly of Western values.

The spillover effects of the revival of Islamic trend of thoughts have become increasingly obviously in recent years. Muslims in Europe and Asia have grown dramatically in the number. In Western Europe, the UK, France and Spain have suffered a lot due to repeated social contradictions caused by Islamic traditions. In Northern Europe, governments' liberal policies toward Muslims' immigration have led to intense conflicts between locals and Muslim immigrants, which can be proved by Danish cartoon controversy and Norway shooting and bomb attack. In Southeast Asia, the tendency of "Islamization" has emerged growing obviously in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since the carrying out of its policies against Israel⁹, which has widened the gap between Islamic countries and non-Islamic countries within this organization. In South Korea, local and migrating Muslims have formed a burgeoning Islamic group that can even be involved in South Korea's Middle East diplomacy.¹⁰

The great changes in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) recently are not the democratization in Western sense. It cannot be ignored that Arab monarchies' maintaining relatively stable in the so-called "Arab Spring" has promoted the expansion of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is a union of Arab oil-producing countries bordering the Persian Gulf based on tribal alliance, to two non-Gulf countries — Morocco and Jordan. GCC's transformation from Gulf community to Arab monarchies' community has been quite obvious, and the countries within it are all representatives of

⁶ See Fouad Zakariyya, *Myth and Reality in the Contemporary Islamist Movement*, London: Pluto Press, 2005.

⁷ See Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, translated by Hamid Algar, London: Alhoda UK, 2002.

⁸ Such as Egyptian Islamic theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926-).

⁹ Because of Malaysia and Brunei's anti-Israel policies.

¹⁰ Song Niu, "Islam and South Korea's Middle East diplomacy", *Arab World Studies*, Vol.30, No.3, 2010.

moderate Islamic forces.¹¹ The competition between radical and moderate Islamic forces is of decisive significance to the future development of Arab world.

Islamic Factors in China and Other Countries' Present-Day Military Activities in the Middle East

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First contact between P.R. China and the Middle East countries took place in the Korean War (1950-1953), in which Turkish army was hit hard by the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. However, at that time, Israel stood on the other side to support UN army by providing medicine and civil food assistance. Such a case led to the "indirect confrontation between Israeli and Chinese armies".¹² Nonetheless, Chinese government had not shaped its Middle East policies clearly at that time.¹³

Military related topics have been touched by China's Middle East policies since the 1950s. After the Bandung Conference in 1955 in which not only China but also many Middle East countries have participated, China began to realized the importance of the Middle East countries in breaking then China's diplomatic dilemma¹⁴ and enhancing cooperation with Middle East pan-socialism countries and organizations against their then regimes and the then US. At that time, Chinese diplomacy was aimed to challenge the modern international system dominated by the West, trying to play an important role in expanding socialism system created by then Soviet Union. The coup in Egypt, struggles against Israel in Arab world and Dhofar armed forces' anti-government activities in Oman, have all been viewed as a part of the expansion of socialism international system in the Middle East. Against such backdrop, China regarded the military coup headed by Nasser in Egypt as a revolution and provided weapons as well as funds to them. During the Suez Crisis in 1956, China has provided direct supports to Egypt, including cash and medical supplies. Western forces landed in Lebanon and tried to military intervene the situation when Ba'ath Party took power in Iraq in the year of 1958. At that time, as the response to that, China shelled Kinmen to force the US to withdraw its aircrafts and some troops to the Taiwan Strait. In the later Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, China's attitude was to condemn Israel

¹¹ Song Niu, "The ASEAN-GCC relations since the Middle East upheaval", *Arab World Studies*, Vol.32, No.3, 2012.

¹² Aron Shai, "Sino-Israeli relations: Current reality and future prospects", translated by Song Niu, *Arab World Studies*, Vol.31, No.5, 2011.

¹³ At the beginning of 1950s, China's main focus is to deal with interior affairs, such as the civil war with Kuomintang regime in Taiwan and Socialist transformation.

¹⁴ At that time, China was isolated by the US-led western allies due to China's "One-sided" diplomacy toward USSR, and China was also isolated by Middle Eastern Islamic countries for political or religious reasons.

and support Egypt and Ba'ath Party's regime in Syria by providing cash and goods. In the 1960s, China agreed Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) setting up offices in China and provided military assistance. Furthermore, because Dhofar Liberation Front was a communist front, it has obtained strong military support from China since 1967. Due to China and Soviet Union's becoming hostile, China's regaining of seat in the United Nations (UN) Security Council in 1971 and substantial development of the Sino-US relations after 1972, China began to not only challenge the modern international system, but also actively join in it. Because of the USSR, the relationship between China and pan-socialist countries in the Middle East had become increasingly estranged.¹⁵ Moreover, China began to stop its support to Middle East anti-government groups, such as it acquiesced Omen and Iran's exterminating Dhofar armed forces in 1973. By this time, China began to develop normal relationship with countries at all levels.

In 1979, the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US, formal implementation of China's reform and opening up, and the outbreak of Sino-Vietnamese War jointly marked China's further acceptance of the modern international system and the further collapse of socialism international system. In the 1980s, ideological factors were seldom involved in military related topics of China's Middle East diplomacy. In 1979, China bought some weapons from Israel and in the 1980s China began to export weapons to countries without diplomatic relations with China including Saudi Arabia. The year 1979 also represented a turning point of the Islamic world, in which Islamic revolution in Iran and Mecca Masjid blasts in Saudi Arabia jointly marked the rise of Islamic thoughts. Islamic forces' large-scale challenges to the modern international system started in the 1990s, which was direct linked with the collapse of socialism international system represented by the great changes in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union. At that time, guided by Deng Xiaoping's idea of "never take the lead"¹⁶, China, which continued to adhere to its socialism path, was not willing to build a pan-ideological camp to challenge modern international system. Since 1990, China began to carry out direct military related activities in the Middle East by sending military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. China has not large-scale participated in UN peacekeeping operation and escorted in Gulf of Aden until the 21st century. The 9/11 attacks in the beginning of this century placed Islamic forces as importance forces to

¹⁵ From the end of 1950s (especially the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution) to the end of 1970s, the relation between China and USSR began to break off; China was isolated by USSR and its allies in East Europe and Middle East, except North Korea, Vietnam, and Albania.

¹⁶ Xiaoping Deng, *Selected Works of Xiaoping Deng*, Vol.3, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1994, p.363.

challenge the modern international system. Henceforth, China's military related activities in the Middle East would inevitably have direct contact with Islam. After entering the 21st century, China's military activities in the Middle East mainly include UN peacekeeping operations and escort in the Gulf of Aden. The former involves countries such as Lebanon and Sudan, and the latter relates to Yemen and Oman that provide assistance to the replenishment of Somali pirates. Thus, increasingly problems revolving religious beliefs are ahead of China's activities in these countries due to the Islamic international system.

First, Chinese army has achieved positive results in respecting Middle East countries' Islamic beliefs and customs. On April 25, 2009, Chinese naval escort fleet "Weishan Lake" arrived Gulf of Aden for escort missions, which has been praised by locals in Yemen that "Every time when going outside, cadres give special notes that local religious customs should be respected, such as the things cannot be pointed with forefingers, and locals, especially local women, cannot be photoed or required to take group photo without permission"¹⁷. In August 2011, the "Wuhan" warship of the 9th naval escort taskforce arrived the Salalah port in Oman and berthed three days for rest and replenishment. Because the arrival coincided with the Ramadan, soldiers on "Wuhan" implemented a timely training on knowledge about local religious beliefs. In ashore activities, soldiers avoided wearing shorts or taking photo of local women according to the customs of Islam. They abided the prohibition in Ramadan and took no food or drink during the time of fasting.¹⁸ In their communication with local Muslims in the Middle East, Chinese troops respected the customs of Islam, which left a favorable impression to locals.

Second, Chinese soldiers' religious beliefs have also met challenges in the Middle East countries. Firstly, challenges from foreign soldiers. In June 2009 when Chinese peacekeeping soldiers stationed Sudan were invited to join religious pray by Tanzanian peacekeeping officers, Zhu Ding, a member of Communist Party of China (CPC) as well as a monitor in the Chinese troops, expressed that "Chinese people believe neither gods or religions. They believe in Marxism, believe in their motherland, their responsibility and missions!"¹⁹. Secondly, challenges from local Muslims. When 9th Chinese peacekeeping engineering battalion in Lebanon sheltered from the rain during a

¹⁷ Hongping Xia & Yaming Hou, "Chinese naval escort fleet was highly praised by soldiers and locals in Yemen: China, Good!" *People's Liberation Army Daily*, April 30, 2009.

¹⁸ "Wuhan warship of the 9th naval escort berths in Salalah port," August 11, 2011, <http://info.cndsi.com/html/20110811/103694113529.html>.

¹⁹ Chunmei Feng, "A never fading flag: Party branch of an outstanding company in Ji'nan Military Region", *People's Daily*, October 29, 2011.

minesweeping operation, Chinese soldiers sent back a preaching album given by a local Muslim, refusing that "Thanks for your visiting. Chinese soldiers respect religious beliefs of Lebanese people. We hope that our beliefs can also been respected", "Chinese soldiers believe in Marxism."²⁰ Cases mentioned above are just a microcosm of religious problems that Chinese troops face in the Middle East. From the perspective of international system, with the increasing of Chinese troops' overseas activities in the Middle East, especially Islamic countries within the region, Chinese troops must strongly respond to the Islamic international system on issues related to religious beliefs. Currently, Chinese troops' understanding toward the Islam still stuck in the level of respecting religious customs, viewing religions as only cultures. For instance, until May 2011, religious culture is just a part of the training contents in the first training camp for standby peacekeeping forces while the most of the contents are professional knowledge and skills training.²¹ Current lack of effective response to problems related to religious beliefs in a deeper level may stand in the way of Middle East countries and their people's understanding toward CPC's religious policies and Middle East policies.

Many countries outside the Middle East have attached much importance to Islam. However, these countries' Middle East policies have also been undermined by the extremist tendency of some soldiers stationed abroad and some domestic public. First, there were only a small number of Muslims in US troops before the Gulf War. During the Gulf War 1990-1991, welcomed by Saudi Arabia, US troops began to station in the Middle East. Because US policies' freedom of religion, Saudi imams' preaching to US soldiers have not been prohibited, that's why around 3,000 US soldiers converted to Islam a few months later.²² Actually, the existence of Muslim soldiers cannot change Christians' dominant position in US troops. Hence, extremist groups and many people in Islamic world in the Middle East still regard US troops as an army of "heathens". Words of George Walker Bush, former US President, about "crusade" and "Islamic Fascism" further intensified such contradiction. On the one hand, topics on Muslim soldiers are controversial among US people and its troops. Some people hold that the existence of Muslims in US troops is a double-edged sword. Muslim soldiers' language skills and cultural knowledge are required while some of their extremist ideas are questioned that whether

²⁰ Wen Huang & Huiqiang Zhan, "Chinese peacekeeping soldier refuses religious propaganda, saying they believe in Marxism", *People's Liberation Army Daily*, April 5, 2012.

²¹ Yongqiang Fan & Zhenying Jiang, "First training camp for standby peacekeeping forces held in Xi'an", *Xinhua News*, May 27, 2011.

²² Shi Tian, & Qing Jun, "US troops question loyalty of Muslim soldiers, claiming they are susceptible to be instigated", November 2, 2013, Available at <http://www.china-news.com/n/2003-11-02/26/363966.html> (accessed 3 December 2013).

their weapons may target to their comrades.²³ In fact, such doubts are not groundless. In the Fort Hood shooting in November 2011, Nidal Malik Hasan, a US Army major and psychiatrist, fatally shot 12 people and injured 31 others. "Hasan was reported to be upset about his pending deployment to Iraq where the US army had been killing Muslims for six years".²⁴ This incident led to US society's questions toward non-WASP soldiers. In July 2011, Naser Jason Abdo, former US Army Private First Class, who's father is Palestinian, was allegedly planning to attack a restaurant frequented by soldiers from the Fort Hood military base. He has publicly opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other hand, some US Christian soldiers are still hostile to Islam. In February 2012, US troops at Bagram airbase set fire to copies of the *Qur'an*, which have led to large-scale protests in Afghanistan and even the whole world. Against such backdrop, US President Barack Obama sent a letter to his Afghanistan counterpart Hamid Karzai apologizing that "The error was inadvertent", "I assure you that we will take the appropriate steps to avoid any recurrence, to include holding accountable those responsible".²⁵

Second, as the representative of European countries as well as a traditional colonial power, France has huge strategic interests in Arab countries in North Africa. During the World War I, a lot of Muslim soldiers from North Africa joined the French army, resulting in the establishment of Paris Mosque in the 1920s and its officially opening in 1926. France is a highly secularized country among its European neighbors while freedom of religion is also being protected at the same time. Hence, French attitude toward Islam is much more friendly than other European countries. In 2005, imams stationed in troops have been officially approved and in 2009, French troops even organized a pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslim soldiers, which is at the forefront among European countries. For a long time, due to its relative independent diplomacy, French activities in the Middle East countries are mainly the operating of military bases and relative activities based on these bases. The most representatives are French bases in United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi and Djibouti, especially the Djibouti that has been regarded as the "example" for France to export democracy to Arab-Islamic countries as well as a new platform against terrorism and pirates for the West.²⁶ Although French government and troops hold a positive attitude toward Muslim soldiers,

²³ Yochi Dreazen, "Muslim population in the military raises difficulties", *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2009.

²⁴ Brian Farmer, *Radical Islam in the West: Ideology and Challenge*, Jefferson, NC.: McFarland, 2010, p.162.

²⁵ Bilal Sarwary, "Barack Obama apology to Afghanistan over Koran burning", *BBC News*, February 23, 2012.

²⁶ Degang Sun, "On the efficacy of French military bases in Djibouti", *Arab World Studies*, Vol.31, No.5, 2011.

repeated violent and abusive behaviors targeted Muslim soldiers conducted by domestic racists still exist. Two desecrations of French graves of World War I in the Muslim section of a military cemetery have taken place in 2008. Two years later, a 14-year-old boy tried to damage seven gravestones of Muslim soldiers died during the World War I. In March 2012, two shootings targeted Muslim soldiers once again proved those extreme racists' hostility toward Muslim soldiers.

The Expansion of Islamic International System and the Response of Chinese Military Activities in the Middle East

With the coming of the era of global governance, non-state and sub-state actors have all been the participants of IR. From the perspective of international system, most IR scholars, such as Hans Morgenthau, believe that states are the basic units of the international system while still others, including Alexander Wendt, hold that individuals are the final units of the international system.²⁷ The specific performance of Islamic international system is the existence of Islamic faith, meaning that the believers of Islam can be found all over the world. Large settlements in Islamic countries, small settlements in Muslim provinces of non-Islamic countries and individual believers in other countries can be connected by their Islamic faith, constructing the Islamic international system with Islamic countries as the core. The expansion of the "territory" of Islamic faith is closely related to current hot topics in international affairs including system transformation, global governance, as well as the topic of war and peace, which are main topics of modern IR. From this perspective, Chinese troops' peacekeeping and escort activities in the Middle East involve the transformation of two international system.

Viewing from the realistic effects, many merits can be found in China's previous experiences. Various modes of relationship between soldiers and religions have been implemented in Chinese troops led by CPC and these modes finally evolve the current one which maintains solidarity of the troops as well as the interests of soldiers with religious beliefs. The Party has attached importance to national and religious issues since the period of revolutionary struggles. Both the Hui detachment of the Eighth Route Army's 3rd column led by Ma Benzhai, a famous anti-Japanese Muslim in the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945) and Xinjiang National Army in early days of the foundation of PRC have imams stationed in the troops. Tibetan army also has clergies of Tibetan Buddhism. However, in fact, army building based on the

²⁷ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, translated by Yaqing Qin, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2000.

division of religions does not meet China's present-day multi-ethnic and multi-religious situation. Besides maintaining CPC's absolute leadership over the army, Chinese troops can also protect non-Party member soldiers' private religious beliefs by flexible means, such as requiring soldiers who have already had religious beliefs cannot engage in religious activities during service, or regarding pan-Islamic behaviors, including Hui and Uygur soldiers' eating no pork, as ethnic minorities' special customs to respect. As to the soldiers whose faiths begin after their enlistment, we can persuade them to give up their Communist Youth League (CYL) or CPC membership. Two different worldviews can be distinguished then, and both soldiers with CPC or CYL memberships' interests and their freedom of unbelieving religions can be protected. These flexible means have well avoided the contradictions between Muslim and Christian soldiers and even the extreme activities against Islam in Western troops stationed in the Middle East. Nonetheless, in its exchanges with the outside, Chinese troops must response to Islamic discourse system, which meets China's national interests and the development tendency of China's military activities in the Middle East, in following aspects:

First, understanding and attitude toward religions have to be lifted to a strategic level according to the reality in the Middle East. For a long time, Chinese troops have been committed to protecting religions and customs of ethnic minorities, so as China's peacekeeping army and escort fleets stationed in the Middle East. However, currently, their understanding to religions still stuck in religious culture or religious customs, or even religious superstition, which does not meet the reality in Islamic world in the Middle East. However, actually, culture and customs are just the derivatives instead of the religions themselves. Moreover, religions cannot be equaled as superstition. Many superstitious behaviors, such as witchcraft, divination and idolatry, are strictly prohibited by *Qur'an*. Importance of Islam in political, economic and social aspects in the Middle East countries must be recognized and realizing the revival of Islam around the globe caused by global religious revival and its role of linking the Islamic international system is the top priority. Islamic international system is quite different from the modern international system that China has participated in. The latter is based on the banishment of religions while the former attaches even more importance to religious factors in IR than culture topics.²⁸

²⁸ Chinese scholars have conducted relative researches on this, which can be found in *Religion and American Society* (Vol.1-10) edited by Yihua Xu, dean of Center for Religion and China's National Security and Department of International Politics at Fudan University, professor of Center for American Studies at Fudan University, series of books and related papers on religions and modern IR. Foreign scholars have also conducted preliminary studies on this topic, see as Fabio Patito, Pavlos Hatzopoulos,

Second, elaborate the word “belief” better. The word “belief” have dual implications in China — religious beliefs and political beliefs²⁹, while in the Islamic world, such interpretation usually does not arouse a common view and may even lead to misunderstandings toward Marxism in the Middle East countries. In Islamic world, “belief” only refers to religious beliefs. Chinese soldiers in the Middle East equal their secular political beliefs with holy religious beliefs, resulting Middle Eastern people’s doubts and questions toward China’s religious policies and the relationship between politics and religions within the country. On religious issues, it will be more effective for Chinese soldiers with CPC or CYL memberships to politely refuse theistic Islamic faith by atheism faith instead of Marxism faith. It is the concept held by CPC that antitheism in the field of religious thoughts is a part of the Marxism’s political beliefs.³⁰

Third, correctly elaborate the relationship between Chinese soldiers and religious beliefs, as well as China’s religious policies. For a long time, Chinese soldiers’ religious beliefs have been attached much attention from the outside. Questions have been asked by foreign military officers that whether Chinese army permits soldiers’ religious beliefs in a discussion on core values of soldiers from both domestic and foreign countries held by China’s National Defense University on November 21 2011.³¹ Although it is reasonable for peacekeeping soldiers stationed in Lebanon and Sudan to express that “Chinese soldiers believe in Marxism”, such expression contradicts with laws and objective reality in China. It has been expressly provided in Article 3 of the *Military Service Law of the People’s Republic of China* that “All citizens of the People’s Republic of China, regardless of ethnic status, race, occupation, family background, religious belief and education, have the obligation to perform military service according to the provisions of this Law”. However, meanwhile, it has also been pointed by PLA General Political Department that army personnel cannot participate in any religious organizations or religious activities, and religious preaching or member developing are not allowed in the army; soldiers with CPC or CYL memberships who have violated the provisions should be persuaded to quit the religious organizations or activities, and incorrigible ones despite repeated admonition should be

eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

²⁹ The political belief in Marxism and Communism.

³⁰ It is worth noting that due to continuous deepening of their understanding toward the relationship between Marxism and atheism, communist parties in Cuba and Vietnam have enrolled members with religious beliefs in recent years.

³¹ Zhenjiang Chu, & Jiaojing Zhang, “Core values are not unique to Chinese army”, *China Youth Daily*, November 25, 2011.

persuaded to quit the CPC or CYL; as to the non-CPC member or non-CYL member officers and soldiers, relative ideological educations should be actively carried out toward them and the incorrigible ones among them should be demobilized; soldiers whose religious faiths begin before their enlistment cannot continue their religious activities during service.³² The *Supplementary Provisions on the Army's Implementation of the Regulation of the Communist Party of China on Disciplinary Actions* issued by Chinese Central Military Commission in July 2005 have also mentioned about the punitive measures on soldiers with CPC or CYL memberships' organizing or participating in religious activities. Therefore, non-CPC or non-CYL soldiers are not necessary to have Marxism political beliefs as soldiers with CPC or CYL memberships. Especially to ones who already had their religious faith before enlistment, what they should do is just to suspend their religious activities instead of completely abandoning their beliefs. From the perspective of the CPC, religions and Marxism are two different kinds of worldviews. Marxism is dialectical materialism while the worldviews of religions are idealism. Philosophically, the gap between materialism and idealism are deep-rooted and incompatible to all individuals and parties.³³ The reality is that personal beliefs of Chinese soldiers are diversified and Chinese soldiers have various choices and freedom to choose their personal beliefs³⁴, which in fact show China's institutional constraints to non-CPC or CYL soldiers and protection to the freedom of religions of ordinary citizens as well.

Fourth, observe the domestic Muslim factors in China's military activities in the Middle East and speed up the legislation on overseas military activities revolving religions. Because the existence of Islamic faith is closely related to individuals, Muslim provinces and Muslim individuals in China are also a part of Islamic international system. Thus, in Islamic countries' eyes, situation and problems of Muslims in China are not internal affairs of China, but the internal affairs of the Islamic world. Reactions of Islamic countries and their people on China's East Turkistan and other religious problems should be accurately treated, instead of simply viewing them as interference on China's internal affairs. Indeed, it is very important for China to respect Islamic culture and customs in its military activities in the Middle East. However, it should be attached more importance that only by gain understandings from most Islamic countries and people on East Turkistan problems, can China smoothly promote its peacekeeping and escort operations in the Middle East.

³² "Do soldiers have freedom of belief in religions?" <http://info.cndsi.com/html/20090305/61393141424.html>.

³³ Weiqun Zhu, "Communist Party members cannot believe in religions", *Qiushi*, Issue 24, 2011.

³⁴ Zhipeng Zhang, "Religious problems in army building", *China Ethnic News*, August 4, 2009.

Chinese government, Chinese embassies to the Middle East countries, and peacekeeping and escort fleets should join together to propaganda China's domestic national and religious policies. Besides, Chinese army's going outside calls for protection from both domestic and international laws.³⁵ China's peacekeeping and escort operations have already gain legal approval from UN and supports from countries concerned while it has not been clearly defined that how can overseas soldiers carry out the military regulations and ordinances. Most of the regulations just take domestic environment into account while ignoring foreign factors. For instance, preaching activities are forbidden in Chinese army while religious organization and Muslims in Islamic countries' freedom of preaching cannot be deprived. Also, Chinese soldiers cannot engage in religious activities; but fasting behaviors of the escort naval officers and sailors during their rest in Oman are Islamic behaviors to some extent. Factors mentioned above have all challenged the relative issues on Chinese army's religious beliefs. Chinese government and Central Military Commission should speed up the formulation and upgrading of laws, regulations and rules on armies' overseas activities, and topics revolving religious will be an unignorable part of that.

Conclusion

Three international systems — the Westphalian system, Islamic international system, and tribal system — are coexisting and intertwining present day in the Middle East. The rise and expansion of Islamic international system in this region are closely related to the revival of Islamic trend of thoughts. Since the 1950s, military topics have been involved in China's Middle East policies, which meets the historical background when China opposed then modern international system and tried to expanded socialism international system. After the 1990s, especially the 21st century, problems revolving religious beliefs are increasing in China's peacekeeping and escort operations. Correctly understanding the religious beliefs, relationship between Chinese soldiers and their religious beliefs, domestic Muslim factors and legislations of overseas military activities are vital to the future development. The Middle East is a region with frequent hot issues. China's military activities are limited within this region, due to its dual identity — a global power as well as the biggest developing country. Smooth implementation of the military activities matters the internationalization of some concepts that China has been advocating, including the concepts of comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security. The globe is currently in a crucial period characterized by the transformation of Western

³⁵ Huaigao Qi, "Going outside of Chinese army calls for domestic legislation", *Global Times*, July 12, 2011.

international system. Against such backdrop, both China and Arab-Islamic countries want to gain a foothold in a post-Western system. Chinese peacekeeping and escort fleets have been misunderstood by peacekeepers from other countries and Muslims from relative countries on religious issues, which is unfavorable to the mutual cooperation between China and Islamic world against the backdrop of the transformation of international system. In the Middle East, China should not only improve its capability in overseas military activities, but also actively deal with nonmilitary challenges, especially religious challenges, in carrying out these activities. Islam plays a pivotal role in the construction of Islamic system with the core of the Middle East. Only by attaching importance to religious factors from the strategic perspective and elaborating the real relationship between Chinese soldiers' political beliefs and religious beliefs from a tactical perspective, can misunderstandings be eliminated, Chinese national interests be better achieved, and the peace and development in the Middle East be further promoted.

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Özet

Günümüzde Batılı ve Batılı olmayan tüm güçler, uluslararası sistemin bugüne kadar eşi benzeri görülmemiş değişimini ortaya koyan yeni bir kurumsal yapı çerçevesinde hareket etmektedirler. Bu değişimin sürerken, dünyanın bazı bölgeleri, özellikle Orta Doğu, çatışmalar ve savaşlar sebebiyle sürekli olarak ötekileştirilmektedir. 1950'ler ve 1970'lerde Batılı olmayan yükselen güçlerin komünist askeri mücadelelerini destekleyen Çin, aynı zamanda emperyalizm ve sömürgecilik gibi Batılı değer ve yapıları temsil eden uluslararası sisteme de meydan okumuştur. Özellikle Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Çin'in Orta Doğu'daki askeri operasyonlarını başlattığı süreçte İslam dini, Çin'in deniz aşırı operasyonlarına etki eden önemli faktörlerden biri haline gelmiştir.

Uluslararası alanda meydana gelen bazı gelişmeler neticesinde Vestfalya sistemi, İslami uluslararası sistem ve kabile sistemi, Orta Doğu'daki düşünce akımlarının gelişmesiyle yakın ilişkiler içeren bir süreci temsil etmektedir. İlk olarak, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra, Orta Doğu'daki ülkeler bağımsızlıklarını kazanarak Vestfalya biçimli egemen devletler haline gelmiştir. İkinci olarak, İslami uluslararası sistemin yükselişi; terörizm ve aşırıcılık, yolsuzluk ve ahlak bozukluğu yaşayan dünyadaki Müslüman bölgelerin modernleşme süreçlerinin başarısız olmalarına atfedilmektedir. Son olarak kabile sistemi, ulus devlet veya egemenlikten ziyade kabileye ait menfaatleri daha fazla önemsemektedir ve bu bağlamda, Vestfalya biçimli ulus-devlet ve egemenlik ile İslami değerlerle çelişmektedir. Bununla birlikte, son dönemlerde İslami düşüncelerin canlanmasının yayılma etkileri, Avrupa'da sıkça tartışılmaktadır. Söz konusu tartışmalar özellikle göç, konuşma özgürlüğü ve İslamlaşma ile aşırıcılık gibi konular çerçevesinde yürütülmektedir.

Çin'in Orta Doğu'ya yönelik politikaları 1955 yılında gerçekleştirilen Bandung Konferansı'nda, Çin'in Orta Doğu'daki pan-sosyalist ülkelere ve örgütlere, kendi rejimleri ve Amerika'nın aleyhine destek verme yönünde aldığı kararlarla başlamıştır. Her şeye karşın, Çin-Amerikan ilişkileri, Çin'in modern uluslararası sistemi sorguladığı, Orta Doğu'daki hükümet karşıtı gruplara olan desteğini kestiği 1972 yılından sonra gelişmiştir. 1970'lerin sonunda reform sürecine giren Çin, sosyalizmin çöküşünün ardından modern uluslararası sistemi kabul etmiş; 1980'lerde ise Çin'in Orta Doğu diplomasi kapsamındaki askeri konularda ideolojik faktörlere oldukça az yer verilmiştir. Bu süre içinde, Doğu Avrupa ve Sovyetler Birliği'ndeki değişimler sebebiyle sosyalizmin çöküşünün ardından İslami güçler, modern dünya sistemine meydan okumaya başlarken; Çin, Orta Doğu'da, BM barışı koruma operasyonlarına katılarak ve Aden Körfezi'nde refakat gücü sağlayarak doğrudan askeri faaliyetlerinde yer almıştır. Söz konusu operasyonlar kapsamında Çinli askerler Orta Doğu

ülkelerinin İslami inanış ve geleneklerine saygı göstererek yerel halkın takdirini kazanmış olsa da, kendi dini inanışları da bir takım engellerle karşılaşmıştır.

İslami uluslararası sistemin performansı tamamen İslami inanışın var olması ile ilişkilendirilmektedir. İslami inanışın "sınır"ının genişlemesi son dönemlerde sistem değişimi, küresel yönetim, savaş ve barış gibi uluslararası ilişkiler konuları arasında yer almaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, İslami uluslararası sistem, Çin'in faaliyet gösterdiği modern uluslararası sistemden çok farklı bir yapıya sahiptir. Modern uluslararası sistem bu bağlamda dini konuları uluslararası ilişkilerden uzaklaştırırken, İslami uluslararası sistem de kültüre ilişkin konulara kıyasla dini faktörlerden daha fazla bahsetmektedir.

Çin'in bu bölgedeki askeri faaliyetlerinin, çift kimlik taşıması sebebiyle oldukça sınırlı olduğu tartışılmaktadır. Nitekim askeri faaliyetlerin düzgün bir biçimde uygulanmasının, Çin'in savunduğu kapsamlı güvenlik, genel ve ortak güvenlik gibi bazı kavramları içselleştirmesine bağlı olduğu düşünülmektedir. Buna rağmen, Çin'in barışı koruma güçleri ile refakatçi filoları, diğer ülkelerden gelen barış koruyucuları ile diğer ülkelerdeki Müslümanlar tarafından dini konular yüzünden yanlış anlaşılmıştır. Bu durum ise Çin ve İslam dünyasının, uluslararası sistemin değişim sürecinde karşılıklı işbirliği girişimlerini olumsuz etkilemiştir.

Çin'in, özellikle Orta Doğu'daki denizaşırı askeri faaliyet kapasitesini artırmanın yanı sıra, askeri olmayan sorunlar ve dini sorunların üstesinden gelmesi gerekmektedir. İslam, Orta Doğu'nun merkezinde İslami sistemin yapılanmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Yanlış anlaşılımlar sadece dini faktörlere stratejik bir açıdan önem verilerek ve Çinli askerlerin siyasi ve dini görüşleri arasındaki gerçek ilişkileri taktiksel açıdan değerlendirerek giderilebilir; Çin'in ulusal çıkarları savunulabilir ve Orta Doğu'da barış ve kalkınma desteklenebilir.