

Radicalism in the Global South

Inequality, Identity and Resistance

Edited by
Erdal Bayar
Huriye Yıldırım Çinar

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CHAPTER 4

International Interventions and the Global South's Radicalization Nexus

Keisuke Wakizaka and Hasan Oktay

1 Introduction

After the end of World War II in 1945, the international system underwent significant changes due to the emergence of new nation-states and the fall of many imperialist states. Under the situation, the new problems of radicalism spread particularly to the Global South, and non-state actors such as terror groups began to play an important role in world politics. In this way, the transition of the international system caused the change of the strategies and tactics of regional and global powers, and the concept of "proxy war" began to be used widely. Under the situation, regional and global powers started to intervene in regional conflicts in the Global South as a tool of neo-colonialism.

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In terms of the topic of radicalism in the Global South, many of the works deal with it from the perspective of Marxism and have the feature of criticism against neo-colonialism (Demirtaş, 2023; Nkrumah, 1965, pp. 187–207), and a smaller number of works exist based on other theories of international relations. In this context, this work aims to discuss the intervention of regional and global powers in radicalism in the Global South after World War II based on neo-realist theory.

The first part will determine the theoretical structure and explain the reason why neo-realism is used instead of Marxist theory. The second part will provide the general information about the historical process of the international intervention in radicalism in the Global South. The next part will discuss the reason for the intervention by global and regional powers. The part of the conclusion will discuss the findings of the previous chapters and emphasize that regional and global powers began to adopt the method of using radicalism instead of fighting directly against each other to avoid the loss of power and to keep their positions in the international system. As for the research methods, the work will mainly benefit from secondary literature reviews because it involves a theoretical discussion.

2 Theoretical Structure: Marxism and Neo-Realism

Concerning the researches about international politics in the Global South, particularly Marxism, neo-realism, constructivism, and other theories, are employed to analyze regional conflicts, and the controversy surrounding these approaches continues.

Especially concerning regional conflicts in the Global South, many works deal with the issues based on the world-systems theory by Immanuel Wallerstein and emphasize that Western states benefit from radicalism and terrorism to keep the Western-centered world system. In fact, according to Wallerstein, the world system consists of core and periphery areas, and their roles and forms of production are different between the areas (Wallerstein, 2004). He argued that the nature of the modern world system is anarchic, and the wealth of the system is gathering in the core area. Therefore, the correction of the socio-economic gap between the areas is almost impossible, and the gap tends to widen (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 27–31). Under the situation, the periphery area is forced to be the area to provide raw materials and food for the core area, and remains "undeveloped." In this context, the opportunity of the

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development of such periphery area is continuously pillaged by the core area and international organizations, radicalism, and so on are defined as tools to maintain the structure of the world system dominated mainly by Western states. Thus, Wallerstein's theory of world system considers the structure of the system constant, although the content of the core area can change in history.

On the other hand, Neo-realism criticized not only classic realism but also world-system theory, affected by Marxism. It is considered an international system with a more changeable and flexible structure and focuses on the influences of the system on the behavior of the states, emphasizing that it is not sufficient to see only the nature of the state. For illustration, Kenneth Waltz referred to the fact that the reason for the wars is the international system as well as human beings' nature and the domestic structure of the state, and especially to the importance of the anarchic international system in his book "Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis" published in 1959. In this context, he emphasized that it is necessary to focus on the effects of the change of the international system on the policy-determination process of the states to interpret cause-and-effect relations in international politics (Waltz, 1959, pp. 23–24). That is, according to Waltz, the international system determines the states' interests, and its transformation changes the states' interests, strategies, and tactics. When neo-realist theory is explained, one of the most important concepts is "power vacuum." This term is used to explain the situation in which an actor, owing power and influence, loses its control over a certain area, and conflict occurs between other actors after that (Barkin, 2009). The transformation of the international system can cause the emergence of such a power vacuum and the change of power balance in the region, and such a situation can trigger the increase of rivalry between global-regional actors to fulfill the blank of the power vacuum (Behr & Heath, 2009, pp. 330–339). Besides, actors in world politics fear the loss of their position in the international system due to the change of the system and the power vacuum and implement different strategies and tactics to keep their position.

In this way, while the world-system theory approach to the issue of global-regional powers' intervention in radicalism deals with only one-dimension, neo-realism deals with the issue by focusing on various dimensions around the transformation of the international system in history. Thus, this work adopts neo-realist theory to discuss the intervention in radicalism in the Global South by global and regional powers.

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3 The Reasons for Intervention in Radicalism

The post-World War II era witnessed a profound shift in the strategic and tactical approaches of states worldwide. Before World War II, the predominant form of warfare was direct conflict between states. However, following the war, states began to demonstrate a marked reluctance to engage in such warfare, instead opting for proxy wars in the Global South. The transformation of warfare is multifaceted, and the reasons for this are numerous.

Firstly, it is important to note that the former imperialist states, including Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan, suffered significant economic and human losses because of the two World Wars. Consequently, these erstwhile imperialist states experienced a significant weakening, leading to the relinquishment of their colonies. Consequently, the number of states escalated dramatically following this period, leading to the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as dominant powers in global politics after 1945 (Sander, 1989, pp. 105–107). Consequently, the existing political rivalry between the states was further intensified, resulting in the former imperialist powers relinquishing their dominant position within the newly established international system. This shift in global dynamics enabled the emergence of new global and regional powers. In this manner, the global and regional powers derived benefit from the issue of radicalism, leveraging their influence to intervene in regional conflicts. This approach was adopted to avert economic and human losses in direct interstate wars, thereby safeguarding their position in the international system. The invention and subsequent dissemination of weapons of mass destruction, most notably nuclear armaments, prompted states to eschew direct warfare between themselves, with the result that large-scale, direct interstate wars became less prevalent following World War II (Zeeberg, 2015). Conversely, the prevailing global and regional powers favored intervention over regional conflicts in the Global South. Consequently, the discourse shifted toward proxy wars between global and regional powers, thereby transforming the issue of radicalism.

The evolution of the international legal system and the advancement of regionalization, notably the establishment of regional military organizations, have contributed to a decline in direct interstate conflicts. This decline has prompted regional and global powers to assume a role in addressing the issue of radicalism in the Global South. Following the

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establishment of the United Nations, there was a strengthening of the sanctions system in place against violations of international law. Consequently, the UN Security Council was empowered to take measures against actions that jeopardized the maintenance of peace. Moreover, the right of collective self-defense is delineated in Article 51 of the UN Charter (Nuhiç, 2010, pp. 106–109). In response to these developments, regional military organizations such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact were established to establish an environment that would guarantee the rights of the population. This process took place particularly in Europe, Eurasia, and North America (Sander, 1989, pp. 139–143). Interstate wars became increasingly improbable in these regions, with proxy wars emerging as a prevalent strategy to navigate the dynamics of international rivalry and to impede the advance of radical movements.

The inadequate development of the modern nation-state system and the process of regionalization in the Global South. In numerous instances, the processes of national identity formation and the establishment of unity within societies in the Global South have been inadequate, resulting in the exclusion of certain demographic groups from political and economic spheres (cf. Oran, 1977, for the case of Africa). In circumstances marked by significant disparities, such as those previously delineated, the emergence of radicalism is well-documented. Furthermore, the impact of such tendencies on marginalized groups appears to be relatively straightforward to observe. Moreover, the absence of a sufficiently developed sound international cooperation system in the region is frequently a contributing factor to the failure to resolve issues. Simultaneously, a considerable number of states in the Global South are reliant on regional and global powers about technology. This predicament has also given rise to the intervention of said global and regional powers in the realm of radicalism and regional conflicts. These powers derive benefit from radicalism, leveraging it to consolidate their position within the international system.

4 The Historical Process of Global-Regional Powers' Intervention in Radicalism in the Global South: General Explanation

Concerning the situation of the international system until 1945, only the states were regarded as main actors of world politics, and many of the countries in the region, which is called the "Global South" today, had

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been dominated by Great Britain, France, Portugal, and so on. In other words, the modern nation-state system had not spread to many of the areas of the Global South. In fact, most wars until 1945 were fought between states, and non-state actors were not considered important. For example, global and regional powers fought directly against each other in the current Global South in both World War I and World War II (Armaoğlu, 2004).

However, the international system was completely transformed after the end of World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union began to emerge as the hegemonic powers over the world instead of the traditional imperialist states such as Great Britain and France. At the same time, many states in the Global South became independent, and the modern nation-state system spread all over the world. In this situation, both made interventions in regional conflicts stronger and got support from radical movements in the Global South based on their beliefs during the Cold War (cf. Ginor & Remez, 2022, pp. 14–32). Therefore, these regional conflicts and the issue of radicalism became proxy wars between the Eastern socialist and Western democratic-capitalist blocs.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the beginning of the fall of the Eastern Bloc in the 1980s made the structure of the international system more complicated. The influence of regional powers such as China, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Brazil, and so on has increased to an important degree in international politics due to their drastic economic development. Thus, these new regional powers, as well as the global powers that already existed, started to get involved in the issue of radicalism. They did this to try and keep their influence in the international system or increase it. Also, the rise of non-state actors such as private military companies has made the situation more challenging and complicated. For example, Academi (the former Blackwater United States) played an important role in the Iraq War (Singer, 2007), and Wagner, established by Evgeni Prigozhin, participated in regional conflicts in Africa (Pokalova, 2023, pp. 1–23).

The interventions by global and regional powers to use ideological and religious radicalism in the Global South became more common after the Cold War began. Especially the United States and the Soviet Union actively interfered in the regional conflicts and supported radical groups or the government's anti-terror policy to strengthen their position in the region. For example, in terms of the issue of Palestine, while the Soviet Union behaved cautiously toward the Palestine Liberation

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Organization (PLO), Fatah and other organizations cautiously (Kreutz, 2004, pp. 9–10), it established secret contacts with some Palestinian leaders and strengthened cooperation with many Palestinian social organizations in the 1960s. These organizations used to receive aid from the Soviet Union, and the Soviet government provided scholarships to many Palestinian leaders and activists for study in the Soviet Union. After the Six-Day War in 1967, the Soviet Union strengthened its relations with radical Palestinian socialist and nationalist movements. In July 1969, the Soviet government recognized Palestinians as an independent ethnic-national group and considered that they had the right of national self-determination (Kreutz, 2004, p. 10). PLO continuing armed struggle against Israel was recognized as a legitimate representative of Palestine by the Soviet Union, and its embassy was opened in Moscow in 1974 to discredit the progress of the United States in the region (CIA, 1974; Golan, 1986, p. 285). After the attack on Lebanon by Israel in 1982, a lack of unity began to emerge inside the PLO, and the USSR supported Fatah led by Yasser Arafat (Golan, 1986, pp. 286–287). On the other hand, the Western bloc, led by the United States, mainly supported Israel against Palestinian armed groups and did not recognize the PLO officially. In fact, the United States regarded the PLO and Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, as a terror group and did not support the PLO's aspirations at the United Nations (Office of the Historian, 1970). Although the United States adopted a moderate approach to Palestine during Jimmy Carter's period (Jensehaugen, 2018), it passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in December 1987 and regarded the PLO as a terrorist group. Thus, the US government banned almost all the PLO's activities and tried to close its information office, although it was reopened in 1989 (Lindholm & Hammer, 2003, pp. 80–81). As explained above, both the Soviet Union and the United States intensely interfered in the issue of radicalism in Palestine through Palestine and Israel, respectively, and the issue became a proxy war between these global powers during the Cold War.

Especially after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, not only global but also regional powers began to interfere in the issue of radicalism intensely. Iran adopted radical Shia Islamism as an official ideology and oriented to supporting radical Shia organizations in the Middle East and Africa to increase its influence on the region. Since Hezbollah was established in Lebanon in 1982, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has been playing a crucial role in training its combatants, and Iran provides a great number of arms and money to the organization

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(Levitt, 2021). Hezbollah played an important role together with Iran and Russia in supporting the Assad Regime during the Syrian Civil War, and it contributed to the increase of Iranian influence on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea area as its "legion army." Besides, Iran is deeply involved in the development of Shia radical organizations also in Yemen, Bahrain, and Iraq, and the Qods Force provided military training, arms, and financial support to them (Lane, 2023). As for Palestine, Iran actively supports Hamas as well as Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian radical Shia Islamist organization against Israel and the Western bloc (cf. Mercan, 2024). In this way, Iran seeks to keep its domination over the Middle East by using radical Islamist groups and interfering to the issue of radicalism. Sunni Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar also financed and armed Sunni radical groups such as Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement and Jaysh al-Islam against the Assad Regime, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah (Karouny, 2013). Furthermore, Iran is trying to increase its influence on Nigeria through Sheikh Zakzaki's Nigerian İslam Movement, and the organization often clashes with the Nigerian government (Oktay & Wakizaka, 2025, pp. 205–206). As referred to above, not only global but also regional powers began to benefit from local radical movements to challenge the hegemony of the Middle East, especially the Arab world.

A similar situation can also be observed in Afghanistan. While the Soviet Union supported the Communist Afghan government between the 1970s and 1980s and sent its army to Afghanistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan actively supported radical Islamist mujahedeen against the USSR. These states provided military and ideological education, a great number of arms, and financial aid. At the same time, Saudi Arabia not only collected a great amount of money for mujahideen through donations from the public but also encouraged radical Islamists to participate in the war against the Soviet Union (Hegghammer, 2011, p. 62). The important members of Taliban and al-Qaeda, such as Muhammad Umar, Osama bin Laden, and Ayman Zawahiri, also gained military experience, and this situation caused the spread of international radical Islamist terrorism (Fujiwara, 2001, pp. 52–53). Even after the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan in 1989, a civil war continued between various armed groups in the state, and especially regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia continued to support local armed radical Islamist groups to strengthen their position in the region. Especially Pakistan and Saudi Arabia played an

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important role in the Taliban's ascendance to power in 1996 and recognized its legitimacy later (cf. Khan, 2007, pp. 141–157). In this way, radicalism in Afghanistan became more complex and grew due to the intervention of regional and global powers.

After the start of the twenty-first century, global and regional powers started to interfere in regional conflicts and the issue of radicalism through supporting the government's fight against terrorism to strengthen the legitimacy of the powers' existence in the region. For illustration, after the attack on Taliban in 2001, the United States began to intensify its anti-terror activities in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and other countries in South and Central Asia, as well as in Afghanistan. It continued a military operation inside Afghanistan and Pakistan against radical Islamism and strengthened military and economic cooperation with the regional states (Shindo, 2004, pp. 80–84). Russia also started to intensify its influence on Central Asia through its anti-terror activities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Güneş, 2013, pp. 190–191).

Russia got involved in the civil war in Syria by supporting the government there (the Assad regime) in its fight against radical Islamist groups, especially ISIL. It established Khmeimim Air Base in 2015 and has attacked radical Islamists and opponents many times (Dilek, 2017, pp. 58–82). Iran also supported the Assad regime actively against radical Sunni groups in the context of the common Shiite faith and sent Shiite militia to Syria (Bilgetürk, 2018, pp. 414–417).

Moreover, it is evident that a similar situation is observable in Mali regarding the African continent. The Tuareg people have been engaged in an ongoing insurrection against the government of Mali. Radical Islamist organizations, including Ansar Dine and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), have also been active participants in the civil war. The repercussions of this situation were not confined solely to Mali; its neighboring states, including Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, among others, were similarly impacted. In 2013, the French army undertook a major anti-terrorist operation in the northern region of Mali (Erforth, 2020, pp. 564–565), thereby demonstrating its influence in the Western African region to the global audience. Conversely, Russia has also been increasing its military influence in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. Indeed, the Russian government provided support to the Malian government's anti-terror operations via the Wagner Group until 2023, at which point the Africa Corps of the Russian Army took over. The corps continues to operate in Niger, Burkina Faso, Central Africa, and Mali

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(Bryjka & Czerep, 2024). Furthermore, Russia has significantly expanded its influence on the African continent through its intervention in the region to combat radicalism (Bryjka & Czerep, 2024).

Thus, global and regional powers are trying to keep or increase their influence on the region through supporting radical groups or the governments' fight against radicalism. Consequently, the intervention against radicalism in the Global South is frequently used as a tool to strengthen the global-regional powers' position in the international system, and the struggle against radicalism and international terrorism itself has become a field of rivalry between global-regional powers.

5 Conclusion

As the issue of the emergence of international terrorism and the rise of radicalism in the Global South are dealt with as important agendas of World politics, the intervention of global-regional powers in regional conflicts and radicalism also began to be discussed in the public and academic world. Concerning the topic, the mainstream adopts the world-system theory affected by Marxism and interprets the issue in the context of Western states' continuous exploitation of the Global South. Nevertheless, this approach is predicated on the notion of the international system as an entity that is impervious to change, with the analysis being constrained by the limitations of a single dimension. Accordingly, the present study employed a neo-realist framework to analyze the issue.

In fact, the collapse of the old international system caused a change in the states' strategies and tactics in world politics and directed some of them to intervene in radicalism in the Global South, such as Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, African states, and so on. Thus, the fight against radicalism and international terrorism itself became the field of harsh international rivalry.

In terms of the factors that precipitated the intervention of states in the pursuit of radicalism, the post-1945 transformation of the international system and the political developments that ensued served as a catalyst, prompting states to relinquish their involvement in direct interstate wars and instead engage in the resolution of regional conflicts and the mitigation of radicalism in the Global South. Furthermore, the inadequate development of the modern nation-state system and the process

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of regionalization in the Global South have also resulted in the intensification of intervention by regional and global powers in the radicalism of certain regions.

In conclusion, the formation of a new international system has led the states to pursue the avoidance of direct interstate conflicts and to benefit from regional conflicts in the Global South and the "struggle against terrorism" itself, becoming the conflict field between global and regional actors.

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